

MISHKAN

A FORUM ON THE GOSPEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE



Jerusalem

MISHKAN

A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People

“ESCHATOLOGY AND JEWISH EVANGELISM”

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Reactions to the Last Issue

Editorial

A year has passed since the publication of the double issue 30-31, *Facts & Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel*. During that time close to fifteen hundred copies have been sold (compared to the normal *Mishkan* circulation of around five hundred). In addition to those faithful five hundred subscribers, copies were sold through Messianic bookshops in Israel and by mail to many who ordered from abroad.

Reactions to the book were not slow in coming. With the exception of one man, reactions from outside Israel were invariably positive. Inside Israel, the majority were positive, expressing appreciation for the work done and interest in the findings. As often happens, however, the dissenting minority was generally much louder than the supportive majority, and this gave the impression that the opposition to the book was greater than it actually was. After a few objections had been received in writing or aired in conversation, it became possible to discern a pattern of repeated themes.

Most of the objections related to the specific content or appearance of the book, or to matters which touched on the communication between the authors of the survey and those they surveyed. We may divide these into five general categories:

- 1) We did not know that it would look like this.
- 2) We did not give our permission.
- 3) Information about our congregation (or about me) is inaccurate.
- 4) Why discuss arguments and disagreements and old wounds which have healed?
- 5) Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses (and Catholics?) should not have been included.

It was agreed among the editors of the journal (two of whom are the authors) that these questions should be dealt with by the authors themselves.

Two objections had to do with the very idea of conducting and publishing such a survey:

- 6) This should not have been done. What possible purpose could it serve?
- 7) The exposure here is dangerous. We are giving too much information to our opponents.

Since these two responses relate to the basic *Mishkan* editorial decision to publish the survey, it is appropriate that they be replied to by the editors.

Before replying to 6 and 7, it may help the reader to understand the inner workings of editorial matters as regards what material is included in the journal and how responses are handled. When the journal receives articles – solicited or not – they are screened by the editors to make sure they conform generally to journal policies. Thus, for example, *Mishkan* will not publish a personal attack on someone. If an article is received with such material in it, it will either be refused outright or sent back to the author to be revised. While all of the editors can be called upon to read submitted

material, the bulk of the routine screening falls on the general editor and the editorial secretary, who is a full member of the editorial committee.

When letters are received by the journal relating to a published article, they may be answered by the editors, or they may be sent to the author. Who responds depends on the nature of the reader's questions. If the reader is relating to something written by the author, then the journal forwards the letter directly to the author without becoming involved in any way in the discussion between reader and author. If, however, the reader is objecting to the journal allowing a certain author even to have his material published, it becomes the responsibility of the journal to reply to the reader. Thus, for example, several years ago some readers objected in principle to the appearance in the journal of articles by writers who were not believers in Jesus. The responsibility for answering such objections properly fell to the editors and not to the authors themselves.

This rather long excursus is necessary for our readers to understand what happened in the process of preparing issue 30-31. For the first time in the 15-year history of the journal, the entire content of an issue was written by those who would normally be responsible to screen it. This meant that the built-in screening mechanism was inadvertently disengaged. Those who would normally screen material from authors were now themselves the authors, and there was no outside screening of the final product.

The variety of objections to the book made it necessary for the editorial committee to divide itself into two groups. Those matters which are clearly decisions of editorial policy are answered here by the editors who are not the authors. All matters pertaining to the content of the last issue and the way in which the survey was carried out and interpreted will be the responsibility of the authors (who also happen to be the general editor and editorial secretary of the journal.)

Why do such a survey?

As we have noted, there were those who strongly took issue with the very idea of doing such a survey and publishing the results. There was the odd voice saying that the lesson of David's census showed that God is opposed to counting the people (2 Sam 24; 1 Chr 21). It is highly doubtful in our view that this was the basic reason for God's displeasure, and even among those who had objections to the book almost no one actually held the position that all censuses are against God's will. Some, however, could see no productive purpose for publishing such a book. What possible good is it, they asked?

This is a question with several answers, some of them appearing already in the book itself. The Messianic movement in Israel is not just a small or passing phenomenon. It has established itself well during the past generation. Those who belong to it can hold their heads up. This is something God has done, and like the congregation in the book of Acts, it is well worth documenting. Several of the editors of *Mishkan* are historians by training, and the documentation and preservation of important historical information has undeniable intrinsic value for us.

The early Christians were ignorantly or maliciously accused by pagan opponents of some horrendous practices, including incest and ritual murder. The response of the church writers was to say "Come see who we are. See that we are good, law-abiding people." In Acts 26:26 Paul was able to say, "The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner." It is our strong conviction that we who have

identified ourselves with the Messiah of Israel have nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be afraid of, and nothing to hide.

In further answer to this question, we would say that the more we know about ourselves the better we will be able to function together. Here we now have documented evidence that over 40 percent of the Messianic congregations in the land are Russian-speaking. This knowledge should radically alter the way we do things, the way we publish, the way we plan conferences and other events. Were we aware of the backgrounds of other congregations in our area? Did we realize that children now make up such a significant proportion of the believing body in Israel?

We are exposing ourselves unnecessarily and dangerously

It will be seen that this objection is not unrelated to the previous one, and often they were voiced in the same sentence. Has *Mishkan* served the purposes of our opponents by revealing to them information which will now be used against us? Some of the letters received even showed evidence that the writers had not actually read the book. They claimed that by giving the addresses of congregations and their meeting times we had set them up for open harassment. In fact, the book does not give locations or meeting times.

This objection is nonetheless different from the previous one in that it has a kind of built-in time limitation on it. If the book contributes to or even encourages persecution, then it is reasonable to assume that such persecution will happen close enough to the appearance of the book, that there is a clear cause and effect relationship. In fact, at this writing – some nine months after the book’s appearance – not one instance of harassment can be even indirectly attributed to the availability of information in the book. We might add that not one of the people who raised this objection in June and July has called or written to say they had evidently been mistaken.

Perhaps more telling here, however, is the reaction to the book in the orthodox media. This is treated in an article in this issue. Surely it is significant that not one religious newspaper has rejoiced that information is finally available to show what a dangerous phenomenon the Messianic movement is, that here is material which can be used to fight it. To the contrary, the findings in the book have generally been rejected. The numbers, they say, are too low. The anti-mission organizations, of course, need large numbers of Jewish believers so that they can raise more funds to fight them. The modest reality which emerges from the survey is not to their liking. Let us not deceive ourselves: our opponents are not stupid, and they are not uninformed. It is probably no exaggeration to say that there is little or nothing in *Facts & Myths* which they do not already have several times over in their computer database.

We may close this section with a true anecdote emerging from the book’s publication. While there were a handful of congregations (about five) which did not wish to be interviewed for the survey, there was only one pastor who explicitly forbade any information about his congregation to be published. He said he did not want publicity and justified his refusal in part by claiming that counting the people was a violation of God’s will. Several months after the book’s publication, there appeared in a Norwegian Christian daily a long interview with this man, complete with his photograph. In the interview he gave information about his congregation and about the body of Messiah throughout Israel. In answer to a question, he even cited information about the number of congregations in Israel “according to a new book.”

Certain of the author-responsible items (1-5) were also matters of disagreement between the authors and some of the other editors. However, nothing in this editorial or in the articles mentioned above should be construed as indicating a split between the editors. In all of the discussions following the appearance of *Facts & Myths*, the editors, by the grace of God, have been able to maintain a spirit of love and mutual respect. It is our united prayer that the book will contribute to the growth of the body of Messiah and that *Mishkan* will continue to be an instrument to promote and encourage Jewish evangelism and the understanding of Messianic Judaism.

Ray Pritz

Response from the Authors of *Facts & Myths*

Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil F. Skjøtt

Mishkan was first published in 1984 and since then 32 issues have appeared including the present one. Without exaggerating it can be said that none of the 29 issues published before the double issue (issues 30-31), entitled *Facts & Myths About the Messianic Congregations in Israel*, have received as much attention and interest as this double issue.

Mishkan's Celebration of the State of Israel's 50 Years Anniversary

The editorial of this issue addresses some of the questions put to us as authors of *Facts & Myths* after it appeared. It is of course not the first time the editorial board has received reactions and also negative critique of an issue and, dare we say, fortunately so. Had this not been the case the conclusion would be that all the previous published articles had been without stimulus and impulse.

Although the survey appears as a book, it is a double issue of *Mishkan* and should be viewed and evaluated by the same criteria as other *Mishkan* issues. Articles in an issue of *Mishkan* often address the same main theme looking at it from different perspectives.

Similarly, *Mishkan* 30-31 is an issue with a main theme. It is the last of three issues celebrating the 50 years anniversary of the State of Israel as *Mishkan* announced it would do by "focusing of the mission of the Christian Church and on the conditions of Messianic Jews in Israel from 1948 to the present." (*Mishkan* 28/1998 p. 1.)

The list of contents on p. 3 of *Facts & Myths* clearly indicates how the survey is compiled. The order in which the chapters appear as well as the vocabulary used show when we talk about Messianic congregations and when we talk about other groups. How the survey was conducted is explained in the chapter "Collecting and presenting the material" (pp. 11-20).

And now to the five objections mentioned in the editorial which it is our responsibility as authors to answer.

Five Critical Objections

Although we would much rather discuss some of the many challenges to the Messianic movement raised in the survey, we shall attempt in brief to answer the five objections already mentioned in the editorial.

We did not know that it would look like this.

This objection has come from a couple of the congregations which granted us an interview. Our answer is that we made it clear during the interview that it would be published in *Mishkan*. We find it difficult to accept that printing the material with a different cover makes a significant change. After writing up the interviews those

interviewed were sent a copy for their approval. Below is a copy of the letter attached to the profiles sent for approval. Based on this the reader can decide whether we acted unethically. The letters were sent in the end of May 1999 and read:

Re: Survey of the Messianic Congregations in Israel 1998-1999

First of all thank you very much for your time and your cooperation in connection with our survey of the Messianic congregations and fellowships in Israel. We appreciate it very much and it has been of great help.

As mentioned when we did the interview we would like you read it before publication. Included is what we have written about your congregation or group in particular. It is based on the information you gave. If we have used other sources as well these are mentioned at the end of the article. The article about your congregation will be one of the about 70 articles to be printed, each one on a different congregation. The articles on the congregations will follow a more extensive article with the title: "Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel." It will have a historical introduction, an explanation of how the survey has been done and then focus on some general questions and issues. We hope to be able to send this issue of Mishkan to the printer around 1 July 1999 and will of course send you a copy when we get it back from the printer.

*Please take time to read through our write-up on your group. If there are things that we have misunderstood, please correct them. Especially we would like you to pay attention to numbers mentioned, including the numbers in the different categories, and spelling of names, both the name of the congregations and names of persons mentioned. We have left a few things in **bold**. Hope you can fill out the missing information. Should you have newspaper clippings about the congregation we would appreciate a copy.*

We would prefer to use full names. But should you or any other persons mentioned feel hesitant do let us know and we will of course respect your wish. It is possible to use initials or just the first name.

We hope very much that you can return this to us within a few days with your corrections. Please - if possible - use this fax number (Caspari Center) 02 6251933. If we have not heard from you before 5 June, we will assume that you have no comments.

Again thank you very much for all your help.

Yours - in our Messiah - and with greetings also from Kai Kjær-Hansen.

Bodil F. Skjøtt

Edit. secr.

We did not give our permission.

This objection came from a couple of the six congregations which did not grant us an interview. Our response is that when we approached them for an interview we did not ask for permission to write about them, but for an interview in order to be able to write the profile on the congregation as accurately as possible. Had we been granted an interview we would of course have sent them our draft for their approval before publishing it. Five of the congregations which did grant us an interview had second thoughts before the publication. We therefore did not publish their names nor locations. In the book they appear as anonymous (see pp. 14-15).

With regard to the congregations which did not grant us an interview, the criteria we set for ourselves as authors were to avoid publishing names of people still living unless their names appeared already in material from the Israeli press. We have expressed our apologies to one person whose initials we have used although we had not found the person's name in any material from the Israeli press.

We have also noticed that it is old, well-established, and well-known congregations which have objected here, rather than new, young, and Russian-speaking congregations.

Information about congregations (or about me) is inaccurate.

This objection has come mainly from the few congregations which did not grant an interview. The description of the history of these congregations is – as stated in the individual profiles – based on written sources. We will be the first ones to admit that these sources are imperfect. Some of the inaccuracies of the survey would have been avoided had an interview been granted.

In the final editing some changes were made which we as authors are responsible for. In one case we had written “the leader had a call from the Lord.” This was changed after the person had given his approval to “the leader received what he describes as ‘a call from the Lord.’” Our intention was not to pass any value judgment. As authors writing history we can express what the person believes, but we cannot express ourselves on behalf of God.

Why discuss arguments and old wounds which have healed?

The objection comes mainly from congregations which did not grant us an interview. Our response is that this we have learned from the authors of the Bible. There is much in the stories told in the Bible that hurts, and the biblical authors are very open and honest in their descriptions of the people of God. Both the Tanakh and the New Testament mention splits and disagreements. In *Facts & Myths* we have tried to give a realistic picture of the Messianic movement today. To be on holy ground and to be part of the national restoration of Israel have not eliminated splits and disagreements. Perhaps we have destroyed a romantic picture of a movement where people are more in agreement with one another than believers elsewhere.

Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses should not have been included.

This objection has been raised by many from within the Messianic movement, including three members of the editorial board, Gershon Nerel, Ray Pritz and Tsvi Sadan.

However, we wish to acknowledge that the decision to include these groups was that of the authors of the survey and ours alone. In our discussions with board members after the publication, the three persons mentioned made it clear that they would have omitted the material on the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. We as authors decided differently.

On p. 12 and p. 56 of *Facts & Myths* we have made clear disclaimers concerning how we see the two sects in relation to the Messianic movement. It should also be mentioned that these two groups and those dealt with in chapters 9 and 10 are not included in the statistical material and analysis.

We have heard the reactions from many within the Messianic movement in Israel, and we recognize that for some this is a very significant issue. They therefore feel that the need to show sensitivity should have taken preference over the academic

considerations that normally apply to material included in *Mishkan*. We wish to be sensitive to the positions of our brothers and sisters, and it has not been our intention to hurt the image of anyone, not through our discussion on these two sects nor through any other material included. Taking note of reactions from Messianic leaders we placed a note in copies of the survey sold after 1 October 1999. The note reads,

Concerning the inclusion of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons in Facts and Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel (Jerusalem 1999)

In light of reactions received from several members of the Messianic Movement in Israel to the inclusion in this publication of a section on the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons the authors want to make the following statement:

1) *The authors do not in any way consider the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons part of the Messianic Movement. This is stated clearly on p.12 and repeated on p.56. Neither are members of the two communities in any way included in the statistical material of the book.*

2) *The authors regret that the inclusion of the two groups by some readers might be seen as underscoring the myth that there is no difference between them and the Messianic Movement and that they all together are "cults". The authors strongly disagree with this view and maintain that the teaching and doctrines of both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons place them outside the camp of the Messianic Movement.*

However, in writing and compiling the material for *Mishkan* 30-31 (or *Facts & Myths*), we have worked under the assumption that *Mishkan* is an academic journal, "A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People." In the academic journal of *Mishkan* all topics which in one way or another are relevant for Jewish evangelism can be dealt with.

Our decision to include them can be compared to the decision made by authors writing on Rabbinic Judaism. Some rabbinic Jewish authors writing on Rabbinic Judaism in Israel today would omit a chapter on the Samaritans and the Karaites. However, other authors would find it relevant to discuss such groups in a book on Rabbinic Judaism and therefore decide to include such a chapter, with or without disclaimers.

On p. 56 of *Facts & Myths* we pointed out two observations which we thought warrant inclusion in the work. The first concerns the Jehovah's Witnesses. We expressed that they "are equally if not more active than the Messianic movement in presenting their message. They are the target of similar harassment and opposition (as the Messianic movement is)." For any minority group it is important to be aware of the situation and experiences shared with other minority groups.

Regarding the Mormons we said that they paid a high price to be allowed to establish their center on Mount Scopus by giving a promise to the Israeli authorities not to evangelize in Israel. This should serve as a warning to the Messianic movement as well as to foreign churches not to make an agreement with the authorities which would make evangelism illegal.

Facts & Myths: A Selective Evaluation

Lisa Loden*

Mishkan double issues 30-31, otherwise known as *Facts & Myths*, has engendered much comment and not a little controversy in the months following its publication. In response to the debate, the *Mishkan* editorial board decided to contact a number of prominent Messianic leaders within Israel and ask for their responses to the book in the following three areas: 1) pros and cons regarding the issue of openness, 2) positive indicators as revealed by the survey, 3) negative evidence calling for growth and change.

Of the 12 leaders contacted, six responded. While these responses are by no means a comprehensive view of the varied reactions to the book, they are nonetheless representative of the types of comments that are current within the Messianic body in general in Israel.

One of the respondents was Salim Munayer, an Arab Christian who has been active in the Messianic community for 20 years. Munayer has recently completed his doctoral thesis on the ethnic identity of the Palestinian Arab Christians as a minority within the Arab minority in Israel. By means of questionnaires he gathered information on the Arab Christian community. He also researched and collected primary and secondary sources that were relevant to his dissertation. Given his qualifications and his familiarity with the Messianic Jewish community in Israel, it was felt that his comments and perspective would be a positive addition to this evaluation.

All of the respondents expressed their satisfaction that the survey provided the reader with an accurate picture of the Messianic movement. Especially in regard to numbers, information about the Messianic community has been severely misrepresented or distorted. Sometimes this has been done by opponents of the movement in an effort to make the “threat” appear greater than it is. At other times this has been done unintentionally or out of ignorance and at times the figures have been distorted by overly enthusiastic assessments of the situation. To quote Menahem Benhayim:

The lack of hard information has often led to wild estimates and misleading publicity about the size and the scope of the movement. Much of the information promulgated was fueled by anti-mission extremists and sometimes by well-meaning Christian and Messianic enthusiasts to encourage friends and supporters about the movement's growth and impact upon the Jewish community in Israel; and there have also been outright liars who have provided their supporters with fabricated tales of success.

This article will compile and edit the various responses in an attempt to give a sense of the current discussion surrounding *Facts & Myths*. One of the fascinating aspects of the Messianic body in Israel today is its variety. The diverse nature of the leaders' responses clearly demonstrates this observation.

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The Question of Openness

1. The publication has raised the issue of “openness.” Some have commented that the degree of openness which the publication reflects is dangerous and can be damaging to the Messianic movement in the country. Others have welcomed it and see it as being helpful and reflecting a healthy attitude towards the place and position of the believers in Israeli society. Please comment.

Given the diversity of the respondents, their responses to this question were remarkably similar and almost uniformly positive. Baruch Maoz, pastor of Grace and Truth Assembly, comments:

I welcome the publication of Mishkan’s Facts & Myths. The openness evidenced by a good number of congregations and Jewish Christian/Messianic bodies in this country is both needed and encouraging. For all too long, believers in the country and ... around the world have operated under the false impression that the Jewish/Christian movement in Israel is a clandestine, persecuted body of individuals.

He continues by saying, “Not only is our message more credible when we are willing to stand up and be counted on its behalf, but it also renders that message a greater moral force.”

Elazar Brandt, General Secretary of the Messianic Midrasha, Jerusalem, echoes the comments of Maoz on this question, saying that the authors “... have done us a great service by collecting and presenting hard facts about the messianic movement in Israel.” He continues:

I am convinced we need to operate openly and honestly among our own people. The more we appear to be a clandestine underground movement – or heaven forbid, the more we are a clandestine underground movement – the more we offer grounds to our people to fear and oppose our alleged subversive activities ... let the people know clearly who we are and what we are doing.

Menahem Benhayim, elder in the Jerusalem Messianic Assembly, while pointing out that there are some in the Messianic community “who feel threatened by public exposure in the media (which is) always monitored by our adversaries and sometimes used to intimidate believers” also says that “*Facts & Myths* fills a real need for information and provides some outline of what is happening in an extremely diversified community.”

Another Messianic leader who shares the generally positive appraisal of openness is Meno Kalisher, pastor of Beit Geula. He comments extensively on the biblical pattern of congregational life lived in the public eye and particularly focuses on the responsibility of the leaders to make their congregations open and accessible.

The shepherds of the congregation should not be hidden ... The leaders of the congregation should evidence their security in the gospel of truth in order to be a worthy example to the flock of the Messiah ... Every congregational leader should desire that his congregation would be an open fact and that its existence should be known to every resident of his neighborhood so that the way to the house of the Lord to hear the word of God would be made easy for our people.

From the Russian community, representing 42 percent of the Messianic believers in Israel, Jeff Spivak, leader in one of the Jerusalem Russian congregations responded to

the questionnaire. He comments on the question of openness by concurring with Benhayim in understanding the (negative) reaction of some whose names were published. However, he concludes his statements by saying that "... in the long run, if the Messianic movement ever hopes to achieve a degree of recognition in Israeli society, provided the latter develops as a democracy, publications of this sort are necessary and needful."

In the context of the question of openness, four of the six respondents commented on the inclusion of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons in the survey. Each expressed his dissatisfaction that these groups, seen as cults and not as a part of the Messianic movement, were included.

Causes for Encouragement

2. Through the introductory articles and especially the profiles of the different groups and congregations the publication seeks to give a realistic picture of the Messianic movement in the country and reflect its diversity, areas of growth and theological positions. What does the material show you that gives you reason to rejoice and be hopeful for the future?

Among those who responded to this survey, clearly the fact of the growth of the Messianic movement was the most significant factor for encouragement. This was repeatedly stated by almost all of the respondents. Baruch Maoz, Jeff Spivak, Meno Kalisher and Menahem Benhayim all said that they were encouraged by the growth in both the number of congregations and in the number of new individual believers.

Meno Kalisher's response is representative of those surveyed:

When I read the book, I was happy to see the number of congregations all over the country. ...The book points out that the congregations have grown because of the wave of immigration. I was happy to see that the new immigrants are finding the house of God all over the country and that they are fellowshipping with their brothers.

As a new immigrant himself from the former Soviet Union, Jeff Spivak says, "Rejoicing has to do with the obvious growth of the movement, especially since 1990 due to massive aliyah from Russia. It is incredible to think that over the last 10 years Russian Jewish believers came to constitute nearly half of it."

To this common expression of encouragement on account of growth, Baruch Maoz adds that he is encouraged by two other factors.

I am encouraged by the mere fact that so significant a proportion of local believing bodies in Israel are willing to be exposed to public view...and perceive such a tendency to be directly related to the growing willingness of local believers to engage in open evangelism and to seek other moral ways to impact their society ... I am delighted with the expressed desire of many such groups to improve the training of those who serve them.

Writing from his interest in the demographics of the situation, Salim Munayer found it "especially encouraging and interesting that they (the editors) included some details about the specific roles of women in various congregations."

Causes for Sadness/Areas for Change and Growth

3. *In the same way, what does the material show that saddens you or what areas do you see as those where change and growth are needed?*

The leaders who responded to the questionnaire were very forthcoming in answering this question. While there were a minimal number of areas listed that were causes for encouragement, the areas that were cited as needing growth or change were many. In answer to this question, the diversity of the Messianic community was much in evidence as is seen by the different responses.

Two of the respondents pointed out that in matters of self-definition, the terminology used was overwhelmingly Christian rather than Jewish. Elazar Brandt says he “is saddened by some trends that became painfully evident” as he read the survey and analysis.

Our own self-definition stands almost completely within the Christian framework. When asked to define beliefs and practices, almost to a man the leaders used Christian terminology ... I hear no one among us saying he or his group is Reform, Conservative or Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Hassidic, or even Karaite. I read of no connections with the Jewish community, no use of Jewish terminology.

In light of this, he continues by asking some pointed questions: “What is Jewish about us? ... How Jewish can we claim to be when so many of us are meeting in church-owned facilities, our leaders are trained and ordained and financed by Christian entities and 39 percent of our people are not Jewish?”

For Brandt, this has serious implications for the work of the gospel and he asks, “Are we indeed fulfilling the great commission to our own people? Or do we realize the worst fears of our critics, donning some Jewish decorations in order to convert marginal Jews to a new form of Christianity?”

Menahem Benhayim has similar concerns and he points out that, according to the survey *Facts & Myths*,

The majority of the congregations, and especially the immigrant groups from the former USSR and Ethiopia, reflect a thoroughly ‘evangelicalized’ movement with varying degrees of Jewish and Israeli culture superimposed ... except for a few groups, they seem to be doing little to re-evaluate the traditional interpretations and practices which they have received from our non-Jewish brothers.

The same issue was addressed by Baruch Maoz although from a completely different perspective.

The growing tendency to emphasize a form of Jewish identity that accords the rabbis more authority than they should ... detracts from the glory of the gospel. ... The tendency to emphasize Jewishness is working against a truly biblical spirituality and threatens to dismantle the essential unity of all those who call upon the name of the Lord in spirit and in truth. Unless corrected, these tendencies could well threaten the measure of our faithfulness to God and his word.

Meno Kalisher’s points to three areas that, in his view, are in need of growth and change. One is the method of growth and increase in the congregations. “The growth of congregations springs especially from natural birth and immigration and not enough

from evangelism. Lack of growth from evangelism highlights the lack of maturity in the body.”

His second point is what he perceives to be a lack of unity in the congregations.

In spite of my happiness at the increase of congregations, there is not only growth in the numbers of the congregations but also in the numbers of opinions and differences between them. The great theological differences between congregations have come to the point at which the distance is impossible to bridge.

Thirdly, he sees the existence of ethnically specific groups as a possible hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel whose aim is “to draw all men to Yeshua, not just those who are of our own ethnic group.”

The issue of the unity of the body of believers was also touched on by Spivak and Maoz as an area for concern. Munayer pointed to the diversity of the Messianic community but without highlighting it as an area in need of growth or change.

The lack of theological training among the leadership was another issue that was raised by several of the respondents. Meno Kalisher has already been quoted in this regard.

Maoz commented on his disappointment that the editors (Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt)

could not allow themselves to evaluate the data and to provide their readers with an assessment that could have enhanced the usefulness of their excellent work. But such an evaluation might well have exposed them to reactions which might render their future work in the country more difficult, simply because most of us have not yet learnt the fine and spiritual art of accepting criticism.

Munayer expressed similar sentiments, “For the sake of academic study, it would be good to develop the research further...”

Conclusion

Facts & Myths by its very nature is time-limited in terms of its usefulness. In many ways it is like a photograph that records a specific situation at a particular moment of time. The exact constellation of events recorded will never be repeated. It is unique, and given the nature of people movements, it is in a constant fluid state of change and growth.

The Messianic community can and should benefit greatly from careful reflection on the information given in *Facts & Myths*. In Spivak’s words, “... the movement itself should be the primary beneficiary of the book, since for the first time we can appreciate a “big picture,” something which was lacking in the past.”

Munayer says,

Understanding the figures and facts can only aid Messianic leaders in evaluating the past and their approach to the growth of the Messianic Jewish movement in the future. ... Facts & Myths is an important resource for leaders and its significance cannot be ignored.”

Benhayim adds, “This survey can intensify our prayers, our labors and our vision ...”

Facts & Myths: Review of Reviews

David Smith*

Mishkan's most recent issue, *Facts & Myths about the Messianic Congregations in Israel*, has benefited from unprecedented worldwide discussion and critique. Reasons for the debate range from eschatology to fund-raising to evangelistic strategy. But for whatever reasons, ethical or not, speculation over the numbers of Messianic congregations and their composition has been unbounded. The survey, which by nature places bounds, confronted this speculation. That is the source of much controversy.

Clearly most of the assessment has been expressed informally in conversations between individuals, but several people or institutions have put their opinions to the test by having them published in various newspapers or journals. *Mishkan* editors thought it sensible to publish those reviews, offering readers a broad range of opinions which may temper or strengthen their own.

While reviewers maintain their own positions and ideologies, it is clear no one was indifferent regarding *Facts & Myths*. Sources as diverse as the Orthodox Jewish *Yated Ne'eman*, the secular *The Jerusalem Post*, and the journal of the evangelical Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism read the work and published their conclusions. Interestingly, none of these refute the statistics as they are stated, nor do they attack the methodology employed; rather, they concern themselves with interpretation of data and speculation regarding long-term implications.

Arlynn Nellhaus' review, appearing on *The Jerusalem Post's* book review page, is a good example. "Never have I read such a totally boring book so avidly," she begins. "It has no plot. But it is all about a plot."

Nellhaus then summarizes the purpose of the work and commends *Facts & Myths'* authors Kai Kjær-Hansen and Bodil Skjøtt for their diligence, precision and insight. "By meticulously gathering every scrap of information from a largely reticent population, they got answers. They weighed the information and put their own reasoned interpretation on it."

She offers no judgment but does mention that the authors consider anyone a Jew who came to Israel under the Law of Return. She adds that this means "anyone with a Jewish grandparent" and remarks that was also the Nazi definition. She elaborates no further but that parallel with Nazis seems quite a stretch, especially since an essential link is the State of Israel passing the Law of Return using similar criteria to define Jews as did the Nazis. Surely she wouldn't associate those legislators with Nazis!

A brief summary is followed by the assessment that the growth of the 1990's is largely due to immigration. She comments on the "friendly evangelism" that is employed, "meaning inviting people, especially new immigrants, to meetings and other events ..."

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She holds that this indicates that “‘Messianic’ and ‘missionary’ are virtually synonymous.” A few lines are devoted to Jewish symbolism and terminology in Messianic congregations. She was interested that “Major fund-raising is done abroad. Collections made locally are for social purposes. Some leaders are financed exclusively from overseas sources.”

Finally she makes reference to the “plot” of her introduction (and perhaps the clumsily imported reference to the Nazis), ceasing to review the book in question, but taking advantage of *The Jerusalem Post’s* review page to indict the entire Messianic movement:

In short, the Messianic Movement offers a chance to play Jewish while practicing Christianity. It co-opts Jewish holidays, symbols and prayers and turns them inside out. It presents Judaism as dress up. Members might be Jewish born, but they have abandoned the Jewish religion, however they describe themselves. Authentic Judaism has no job for Jesus. If he is a part of a religion, it is Christianity – period.

And what is the plot of this plotless book? Wealthy, evangelical Christianity is on a crusade to destroy Judaism one Jew at a time and to change Israel from a Jewish country into a Christian country.

The plot is no mystery. The facts are there, plain to read ...

Of particular interest to several reviewers was the number of Russian-speaking congregations and membership increase due to immigration in the 1990’s. Haim Shapiro wrote an article titled “Russian olim boost messianic congregations” for *The Jerusalem Post*, September 17, 1999.

Shapiro calls the congregational growth, due to Russian immigrants, “Perhaps the most striking factor about the messianic congregations.” He notes that 57 of the 81 congregations surveyed were founded in the 1990’s, a time of unprecedented Russian immigration, adding that pre-1990 congregations were augmented by the Russian influx.

Perceptively, Shapiro observes, “It is interesting to note that while in the U.S. messianic congregations often describe their places of worship as ‘synagogues’ and their spiritual leader as ‘rabbi,’ virtually no such group does so in Israel.”

Including the numbers of Hebrew Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, Shapiro maintains “There are just over 5,000 Jewish believers in Jesus in Israel” – a statistic most Messianic leaders would dispute based on the question of who is a Jewish believer.

Menachem Kalisher, reviewing *Facts and Myths* late last year for *Kivun*, an Israeli bi-monthly Messianic journal, was among those who question that inclusion:

Despite my great liking for the book, however, I think its editors erred when they included the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses under the title, “Messianic Congregations.” I am convinced, like most of the believers in this country, that Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are not part of the body of Messiah. That is the reason that we have been struggling for years to explain the difference between cults and the true faith, and make efforts to distance ourselves from those false cults that try to hide behind Yeshua’s name. Since the book was written and edited by people who are our brethren in Messiah, and since both believers and non-believers were included under one name, the book could serve as proof that we are, after all, all the same, and that there is no real difference between believers and Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Despite that criticism, Kalisher warmly received the work, calling it “a pioneer in its field,” “a reference point for any additional research on this subject,” and “approachable, clear and professional.” Kalisher holds, “The large amount of information which is passed around among the believers in Israel has finally been put in writing, in a book which presents us with the difference between estimates and the truth which is sometimes pleasant and sometimes painful.”

In closing, he does again refer to the inclusion of the cults, suggesting that reprints exclude them, but asks that criticisms of Skjøtt and Kjær-Hansen be tempered as they “are our brethren and not strangers or enemies!”

Their work is important. It is clear to all of us that whoever works can make mistakes. People who act, and sometimes err, are preferable to those who just sit on the fence and complain. Finally, the editors of the book are an asset for us. It would be good for us to learn to express our criticism in love.

Orthodox Jewish weekly *Yated Ne’eman* leads with the statement that “there are just over 5,000 Jewish believers in J. [sic] in Israel.” This figure is reached by adding Jewish membership in Messianic congregations to that of international churches, Hebrew Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Even though this figure has been inflated as much as possible (as Shapiro also did), it does give credence to the criticism that Israelis will group Messianic Jews with such cults if their statistics appear side by side.

They also quote an unnamed anti-missionary organization in Israel which said the book underestimated the figures. “There were, an official said, 15,000 to 20,000 messianic believers, both Jews and non-Jews, in Israel, ‘but most of them are Jews.’” It is noteworthy that both mission societies and anti-mission organizations, both dependent on outside contributions, have inflated the figures well beyond what the book’s boundaries will allow.

The *Yated Ne’eman* staff was most interested in the number of immigrants who joined Messianic congregations. In a review titled, “Russian Immigrants Drawn Into Messianic Cults,” they note that about two-thirds of the congregations interviewed arose in the 1990’s, largely due to Russian immigration.

Still, they contend, this doesn’t offer the complete picture:

The fact that only some 20 of these groups were started by Russians and have Russian as their only or first language does not adequately reflect the situation. In other congregations established in the 1990’s, over 90 percent of the members are Russians and the work began mainly as an outreach to Russians.

About half of the Jewish members of the messianic congregations and most of the leaders had become involved while still in the former Soviet Union, the authors say.

The orthodox publication maintained that many of these immigrants violated the law in coming to Israel under the Law of Return, “which excludes those who have converted to another religion.”

It also recorded “120 adult immigrants of Jewish origin from Ethiopia with about 30 non-Jewish spouses and some 50 children in their own groups, as well as fewer than 30 immigrants from Ethiopia who are members of Hebrew-speaking congregations.”

A professor of comparative religions at Prairie State College in Illinois, Jeffrey Wasserman, considers the book “a welcome addition to the literature on Messianic congregations,” but does not refrain from indicating its shortcomings in his review for

the Jews for Jesus internet site. He notes the need for “more sophisticated analysis and careful editing,” and chastises that the book “reads as if it was rushed to publication.” He, with other believers, questions the inclusion of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons.

Supporting the work, Wasserman asserts in his opening paragraph that until the publication of *Facts & Myths*, “The inquiring public was left to anecdotal information and literature produced by participants in the movement whose agenda was often difficult to distinguish from their conclusions.” But in the next paragraph, he maintains that although he is appreciative of the data acquired, he questions “the wisdom of putting this information in public view.” One might ask how the inquiring public might receive other than anecdotal information from questionable sources until more accurate data are made public.

He cautions especially as the survey stems from “Gentile-dominated mission organizations.” According to Wasserman, “Current missiological research links religious persecution with the actions of outside missionary agents. It is, rather, altogether possible that the detailed information catalogued here could be used against the interests of Jewish believers in Israel.”

Wasserman asserts that the authors fail to grasp the significance of the growth of the Messianic congregations in Israel, although he does not specify where or how the “pessimistic perspective of the authors” is expressed. He writes,

By far the most controversial element in Facts & Myths is its conclusion that the Messianic movement in Israel is significantly smaller than most had assumed. In seeking to dispel the sensationalistic estimates of ten of thousands of Israeli Messianic Jews made by Israeli anti-missionary organizations and less inflated but unrealistic numbers quoted by Christian agencies, Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt miss the significance of the 81 congregations they document.

He insightfully perceives the lack of data concerning precisely where and how people came to faith. Although this was not a goal of the work, *Mishkan* editors are discussing how this might be included in a future *Mishkan*.

Writing for *Israel Today*, a monthly magazine published in Israel in English and German, Tsvi Sadan compliments the authors for their courage “to chip away at some of the common myths among Messianic congregations.” He offers an example: “They claim that it is impossible to speak of an ‘Israeli national church,’ due to the many disputes among the congregations.” He continues, “The study also rejects the notion that differences among the major Christian Churches play a major role in these disputes; it is internal rather than external factors that play the major role.”

Sadan continues: “Another myth the authors refute concerns the Jewish identity of the congregations. While many congregations consider themselves Jewish, the study indicates that in most cases they are, in fact, Christian.”

He surmised that *Facts & Myths* leveled its harshest criticism at the Messianic movement regarding finances, as the congregations are heavily dependent on funds from abroad. “Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt said that ‘there is a serious lack of financial transparency and accountability,’ and that some leaders pocket the money they receive.”

Sadan supports the authors’ efforts to present a true picture of the Messianic movement in Israel, by quoting John 8:32: “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.”

Facts & Myths’ most commendatory review comes from Richard Harvey, Tutor in Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies at All Nations Christian College in Ware, UK.

Harvey's review was published both by the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism and the book review section of *Anvil*, a journal on biblical studies produced in England. Calling the work "both a labour of love and a tour de force of diligent research," Harvey contends:

By providing such a composite history of so many groups and individuals the authors have put together not just a 'who's who of the Messianic movement' and a digest of 'what's happening in Israel,' but a valuable resource for the formulation of evangelistic and congregational strategy, and for missiological and theological reflection.

He affirms the inclusion of the Hebrew Catholics, adding that much could be learned from them, and makes uncritical reference to the surveyed "non-aligned groups and others such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons."

Further, Harvey lauds Kjær-Hansen and Skjøtt on their interpretation of data, instead of answering "just the questions of numbers."

Similarly the authors raise certain 'home truths' of which we should take note. The need for growing unity, the ongoing follow-up of those who move on from one group but fail to join another, the fact that so much growth has occurred through immigration rather than direct evangelism, are all issues to be pondered. The influence of expatriate denomination organisations, and the way 'independence' is understood, are also pressing issues that will not go away.

He opines that the work would have its critics and recognizes that this edition contains gaps and typographical and referencing errors, but hopes these will be corrected in future editions. Still, he calls the project "a landmark in the history of the Messianic movement in the land of Israel" and calls for similar surveys to be done in the United States and elsewhere, even urging the authors to produce a "World Messianic Handbook."

Most reviewers of *Facts & Myths* critiqued the work in English or Hebrew, but publications in Norwegian, Danish, German and French were also eager to review it. Odd Sverre Hove, writing for the Norwegian daily *Dagen*, explained to his readers that authors Skjøtt and Kjær-Hansen had to "plow new land" in finding a methodology to complete such an extensive survey and produce this work. This was a challenging task as the authors had to find terminology to describe the different groups of Messianic believers in Israel that would be objective, accurate and comprehensible to those groups in spite of their own "special" terminology, he writes.

In the well-informed introductory chapters the authors explain the methods they have used and the criteria they have developed. Personally I read with great interest the thought given to the question of terminology. Some believers prefer to talk about 'Jesus'; others prefer to use the Hebrew name 'Yeshua.' The same difficulties are seen when it comes to the term 'Jew' or 'Messianic' – not to mention 'congregation,' 'fellowship' and 'church,' 'synagogue' and 'group.'

Calling the book "somewhat of a landmark in this regard," he maintains, "Here we find a high degree of competence in the areas between Judaism and Christianity used in order to give us an honest and most complete picture of how the situation really is in Israel with regard to Messianic Jews."

Johannes Gerloff, writing for the German bi-monthly journal, *Bibel und Gemeinde*, says that the strength of the survey is its clarity, but notes that others have denounced the work as it exposes everyone in Israel's Messianic movement.

Gerloff writes an extensive section titled, “A Messianic Theology,” in which he claims that the survey established that a strengthening of the Jewish identity of the believers has occurred while remaining consistent with evangelical theology and Christology.

At least one reviewer opposed the idea that foreign authors were a disadvantage. After summarizing the work, which most reviewers did, Arnulf Baumann writes, “the fact that they come at the theme as expatriates allows them the measure and objectivity that is necessary for earnest evaluation which neither attempts to cover up flaws nor condemns.”

Writing for *Friede uber Israel*, a German quarterly, Baumann praises the authors for allowing some interviewees to remain anonymous. “Thus they have achieved an extensive and reliable review of the many forms of Messianic Jewish communities that exist in Israel.”

He concludes that *Facts & Myths* is a very well-executed book that “lifts the Messianic movement in Israel out of the mist of mythical fears and hopes that surround it and attempts to place it ... in the sober reality of facts.”

If indeed *Facts & Myths* maintains a plot, as Jerusalem Post reviewer Nellhaus alleges, Baumann’s conclusion exposes it. And it is suspenseful enough.

End Time Speculation in Light of the New Millennium

Mitch Glaser*

Though Jesus clearly said, “no man knows the day or the hour of my return” (Matt 24:36), one of the first questions the disciples asked prior to his ascension was, “... is it at this time that will you restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:7) ?

We are often different than they. We quickly confess that God has not revealed every detail of his prophetic plan, yet we still speculate. Sometimes motivated by curiosity and at other times because we simply long for his return and the end of our present corruption.

However, we also know that claiming to know the day and the hour - and even the year, of his return has caused believers in every age to promulgate disappointment and sometimes pursue destructive behavior. Lives have been ruined and in certain cases entire communities of speculators have been killed, either by their own hand, or by the hand of those who thought they were part of God's end time plan. These abuses and excesses must be stopped.

Still, I am sympathetic to the speculators. I know they appear foolish and suggest that God makes promises he cannot keep. Yet, sometimes I prefer the company of those flaming fanatics who live on the edge of his coming rather than the fellowship of the cautious and theologically correct whose complacency and lethargy even the second coming of Jesus could not stir!

However, we must encourage one another to look ahead in faith and hope, without speculating about the specific date of his return.

C.S. Lewis in his remarkable essay, *The World's Last Night* writes:

*Apparently many people find it difficult to believe in this great event without trying to guess its date, or even without accepting as a certainty the date that any quack or hysteric offers to them. To write a history of all these exploded predictions would need a book, and a sad, sordid, tragi-comical book it would be.*¹

Though difficult to summarize, there is much to learn from date setters past – although they were obviously all wrong. Their mistakes might help us face the future with both hope and dignity.

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¹ Lewis, Clive Staples, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (A Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960) p. 106.

A Survey of Christian Date Setting for the Second Coming

The Early Fathers

In general, the early fathers did not engage in end time speculation. Perhaps this was because they were so certain that the coming of the Lord was near.

The Montanists were one of the first movements in the early church to begin speculating about the end of days. Known for their use of tongues and prophecy, they believed that Jerusalem would descend near Phrygia (west-central Asia Minor).² But, they did not set a specific date.

Hippolytus of Rome believed that Jesus was born 5500 years after the world was created and concluded that the millennium would commence 6000 years after the creation of the world. Therefore, from Hippolytus's perspective, Jesus would return in 496 AD. He also tells the tale of a church leader in Pontus who told his followers that Jesus would come back in a year and when he did not, the believers were devastated.

*The virgins got married; the men withdrew to their farms; and those who had recklessly sold all of their possessions were eventually to be found begging.*³

Augustine identified the millennium with the age of the Christian Church, which seemed to quell any further end time speculation among most Christians.⁴

The Medieval Period

End time speculation was more an issue in the Medieval period. According to Richard Landes, of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University, the year 1000 AD was the subject of great eschatological speculation and it continued throughout the first 30 years of the "last" new millennium. Fundamental to the medieval speculators was the understanding that Jesus would return 6000 years after creation to initiate the 1000 year millennial Sabbath.⁵

For example, Charlemagne was crowned in AD 801, which was actually 6000 AM (the non-Gregorian, secular year) and therefore was thought by some to be the king who would usher in the eternal reign of Christ.

Abbott Joachim of Fiore (c.1135-1202) was one of the first church leaders to develop a complex eschatological system, viewing contemporary events as the fulfillment of end time prophecy.⁶

Joachim was upset with the corruption within the Roman church and was the first, though he was a Catholic, to suggest that the pope could be the antichrist. The European kings that battled with the popes over the next few centuries were viewed as Messianic and each battle the fulfillment of end time prophecy.

² Netherton, Dana, "Taking the Long View" in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 11.

³ Netherton, p. 12.

⁴ Wright, David, "Millennium Today" in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 13.

⁵ Landes, Richard, "The Apocalyptic Year 1,000: Then and Now" (The Center for Millennial Studies, www.mille.org), p. 1.

⁶ Daniel, E. Randolph, "Looking for the Last Emperor," in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 16.

Another medieval speculator was not a member of the clergy, but rather a famous explorer. According to some accounts Christopher Columbus was motivated in his search for the New World by his view of eschatology. Columbus also believed that Jesus would return 6000 years after creation (1656 AD, according to his figures) and that one of the requirements for his coming was that the whole world would hear the gospel (Matt 24:14).

The “shortcut” to the East, which Columbus sought, would provide easier access to the peoples of the world and the fulfillment of this eschatological requirement.⁷

The Reformers

Luther accepted the traditional amillennial view of the Catholic church with one small deviation. He believed that the papacy was the see of the antichrist.⁸ Luther also believed that he was living in the end of days. Luther wrote, “We have reached the time of the pale horse of the Apocalypse. This world will not last any more, if God wills, than another hundred years.”⁹

Calvin did not differ substantially from Luther's view, accepting Augustinian amillennialism as well. They rarely speculated about the timing of the second coming.

The Anabaptists

Two early Anabaptist leaders, Jan Matthys and Jan van Leyden, believed that the New Jerusalem would be fashioned in Munster, Germany.

Matthys eventually took control of the city and stole the wealth of the citizens of Munster, expelled and at times killed those who dissented. He severely punished those who would not get re-baptized. Matthys was killed and Leyden took over. He pronounced himself the Messianic King of Munster, but eventually the bishop's armies invaded the city and reclaimed it amidst terrible costs of human lives.¹⁰

Mark Galli, editor of *Christian History* summarizes, “Significant dates, in fact, seldom, arouse much apocalyptic fever in history. But, significant events do. The late medieval world was full of such events – and apocalyptic fever.” He lists the Crusades, the Black Plague, the breakdown of the Roman church as illustrations of events which caused Millennial expectation.¹¹

Medieval Christians often viewed world events through eschatological lenses. This is a practice, which should always be tempered with caution.

⁷ Stackhouse, Reginald, "Columbus's Millennial Voyage," in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 19.

⁸ Franke, John R., "Salvation Now, Salvation Forever," in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 20.

⁹ Kyle, Richard, *The Last Days are Here Again* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1998), p. 55.

¹⁰ Wise, Robert, "Munster's Monster," in *Christian History* Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, PP. 23-25, p. 23-24.

¹¹ Galli, Mark "Apocalyptic Fever," in *Moody Monthly*, Volume 99 January/February 1999, p. 15.

Jonathan Edwards

Steven Pointer of Trinity International University accurately states that postmillennialism was the dominant millennial view among American Protestants in the 19th century.¹²

The best known and most brilliant of the American postmillennial theologians was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). He is one of the few who actually proposed a starting date of 2000 AD for the millennium!¹³

The Millerites

William Miller, a premillennialist, was a farmer and veteran of the War of 1812 who converted from deism in 1816. He interpreted Daniel 8:14, "Unto 2300 days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed," as a reference to the second coming.

Miller linked this prophecy to Daniel 9:24-26 and utilizing Bishop James Usher's chronology began Daniel's chronology of the 70 weeks (490 years) in 457 BC. He then added 2,300 years (Dan 8:14) and came up with the date of 1843 for the second coming of Jesus.¹⁴

Often the starting point of a particular biblical chronology can lead to the misinterpretation of a prophecy and disastrous conclusions. In fact the point at which an interpreter of prophecy begins a calculation is as important as the eschatological ending point. If you begin with speculation, you will end with speculation.

His views received alleged "authentication" by the appearance of a comet that year. Oftentimes, these signs in the heavens were used to fan the flames of apocalyptic fervor.

When 21 March 1844 came and went without the appearance of Jesus, Miller acknowledged his error. Miller agreed to a new date - 22 October 1844, the tenth day of the seventh Hebrew month, which was also the Day of Atonement.¹⁵ When Jesus did not return on that date, Miller and his disciples dispersed and formed into various other Adventist groups.

Modern Dispensationalists

Early dispensationalism had its more popular origins in England under the leadership of a former priest of the Irish Anglican Church, John Nelson Darby (1800-1883).

The dispensational view of prophecy, advanced by the Schofield Bible, became even more widespread after World War II and the establishment of modern Israel as a nation. For dispensationalists, this was the most significant and most visible sign that we were in the last days.

The most significant book on a prophetic theme in our generation written in the dispensational genre, during the late 1960's was entitled the *Late Great Planet Earth*. Hal Lindsay penned this book, which sold 35 million copies. Clouse claims that Lindsay

¹² Pointer, Steven "Seeing the Glory" in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 28.

¹³ Pointer, p. 28.

¹⁴ Kyle, p. 89.

¹⁵ Shelley, Bruce, "The Great Disappointment," in *Christian History*, Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 32.

predicted that Jesus would return in 1988 and that the rapture would take place seven years earlier, in 1981.¹⁶

This position was based on Lindsay's interpretation of Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:32 about the fig tree. Lindsay suggests that the fig tree is the modern-day nation of Israel and that the generation (40 years) which witnessed the establishment of Israel would be earth's last. Lindsay would later change his view.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Messianic Jewish scholar, trained at Dallas Theological Seminary (as was Lindsay), and who also promotes a traditional dispensational view of eschatology, does not regard the fig tree as a symbol for Israel. He contends that it is merely used by Jesus as an illustration.¹⁷

Mark Galli, in an article in *Moody Monthly*, summarizes the beliefs of some other popular dispensationalist writers. Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel wrote in his 1978 book, *Future Survival*, that "the Lord is coming for his church before 1981." This was reported in Russ Chandler's book, *Doomsday: The End of the World – A View through Time*. Chandler then mentions that Smith changed his view. Pat Robertson, according to Galli, predicted that the Tribulation would begin in 1992, "sparked by a Russian invasion of Israel."

Galli also mentions Grant Jeffrey, who wrote *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny* and suggests that the end of the world will come in the year 2000. Jack Van Impe in a 1992 video claims that these end-of-the-world events will take place eight years from that date - 2000-2002.¹⁸

Even the non-dispensationalist, Harold Camping of Family Radio went out on a limb and predicted the end of the world on September 6, 1994. It did not. But at least he was following the Jewish calendar! Edgar Whisenant gave us 88 reasons why the rapture would take place in 1988. He sold over two million copies of his book. But, he too was wrong.

Whereas most scholarly dispensationalist authors do not set dates, they often encourage us to view current events in light of biblical prophecy. Again, this practice must be tempered with great caution.

Progressive dispensationalism has modified the views of the older schools of dispensationalism. It would be rare to find a progressive dispensationalist who would launch out and declare that a contemporary event is the fulfillment of prophecy.

Modern Preterism

A theological system that might at first seem foreign to this study is modern-day Preterism. Preterists view Daniel 9, the Olivet Discourse, the book of Revelation and other prophecies commonly associated with the tribulation period and the millennium as having already been fulfilled.

The popular R.C. Sproul and the moderate Preterists view Daniel 9:24-26, Matthew 24 and other such passages as having been fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70

¹⁶ Clouse, Robert, "Late Great Predictions" in *Christian History* Volume 18, Issue 61, Number 1, p. 40.

¹⁷ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, (Tustin, California: Ariel Ministries Press, 1983, fifth printing 1995), p. 445.

¹⁸ Galli, Mark, "No One Knows the Hour or the Year," in *Moody Monthly*, Volume 99, January/February 1999, p.22-23.

AD. This was the end of the Jewish age. There is nothing left to be fulfilled in the future except the second coming of Jesus.¹⁹

The more radical group of Preterists, led by scholars such as N.T. Wright, envisions the entire eschatos as having been fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.²⁰ Our concerns regarding the radical Preterist view are obvious. Wright's view is not representative of historic Christianity.

Whereas some dispensationalists tend to see prophetic fulfillment in the daily newspaper, most moderate Preterists view the fulfillment of detailed prophecies as symbolically fulfilled in the events of history. Sproul claims that the "time frame" prophecies (Mark 13:30, Matt 24:14,30 etc.) must be taken literally, but that the details of the events, especially those noted in the Book of Revelation and the Olivet Discourse may be viewed symbolically.

For example, Matthew describes signs in the heavens in Matthew 24:27-30. Sproul quotes Josephus who described the appearance of signs in the heavens at the time of the destruction of the Temple as the fulfillment of those prophecies. Yet, the details of the Matthew text claims that far more will happen in the heavens than what was described by Josephus (Sproul, pp. 122-123).

Yet, viewing specific predictions as symbolically fulfilled in the past is as dangerous as seeing symbolic truths literally fulfilled in our present day or in the future.

Jewish Date Setting

The classic work on Jewish end time expectations and speculation is *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel* by Abba Hillel Silver. Another important work written a few years after Silver's book is *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature* by Joseph Sarachek. Any serious student of Jewish end time speculation should read both these volumes.

The following is merely a sampling of the various views on end time speculation held by some of the major figures in the formation of Rabbinical Judaism.

Saadia Gaon

Saadia suggested that the Messianic age would begin in 965 CE and based this upon his understanding of Daniel 12:7, 11 and 8:14.²¹

Rashi

Rashi however establishes a date of 1352 CE. He bases his calculation on Daniel 8:14, as well and suggests that the Messiah will come 2874 years after the Exodus. Rashi understood the 2300 days mentioned in the passage to mean years. He then takes the numerical equivalent of "evening and morning," 574, which he also understood to mean years and adds them to the 2300 years and arrives at the 2874 figure – which calls for a 1352 CE date (Sarachek, p. 59).

¹⁹ Sproul, R. C., *The Last Days According to Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).

²⁰ Wright, Nicholas Thomas, *Millennium Myth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

²¹ Sarachek, Joseph, *The Doctrine of the Messiah in Medieval Jewish Literature*, (Jewish Theological Seminary, New York 1932), p.37.

Maimonides

Twelve years before his death, Maimonides advocated a date of 1216 AD as the year of redemption. He did not argue from a prophecy of Daniel, but rather via a phrase in Numbers 23:23, where Balaam said, "Now it is said of Jacob and of Israel; What hath God wrought." The common Rabbinical understanding of this passage, was best expressed by Rabbi Hanina in Yerush, Sabbath VI: 9. He wrote, "It appears that Balaam, the wicked, lived at the middle of the world's duration, when he said, 'Now it is said of Jacob and of Israel; What hath God wrought'."²²

Maimonides believed that Balaam lived 40 years after the Exodus, which was 2488 years after creation. When this is doubled, the date of redemption becomes 4976 after creation, which in the Jewish calendar is 1216 CE.

Nachmanides

Nachmanides used the same passages as Saadia in Daniel, but suggests a date of 1302 CE for the year of deliverance.²³

Needless to say, the date passed as well without the redemption taking place.

The Lubavitch

The Lubavitch are atypical of most modern Jewish movements. Many of the followers of Rebbe Menachem Schneerson still believe him to be the Messiah. Some expect that he will rise from the dead and reveal himself to the Jewish people.

The Lubavitch also interpret current events in light of their understanding of prophecy. For example, just before Rebbe Schneerson died, he declared that a prophecy in the Yalkut Shemoni predicting the Gulf War was a sign of the coming of the Messiah. Yet, he never declared himself to be the Messiah.

The Lubavitch are an eschatological community. Their web site is filled with material related to the coming of the Messiah and they actively await his coming and watch for signs of his arrival.

Deliverance from Outer Space

The Heaven's Gate suicides are a prime example of what happens when man's inner yearning for history to be fulfilled goes awry because of sin. According to Aaron Katz, in an article entitled, "Heaven's Gate: A Harbinger of Things to Come," the final actions of the group are reminiscent of the more traditional view of the rapture of the church. Katz writes,

According to Heaven's Gate doctrine: We will rendezvous in the 'clouds' (a giant mother ship) for our briefing and journey to the kingdom of the Literal Heavens.²⁴

This sentiment is strikingly similar to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which is the basis for all Christian rapture scenarios.

²² Sarachek, p. 145.

²³ Sarachek, p. 175-176.

²⁴ Katz, Aaron, "Heaven's Gate: A Harbinger of Things to Come," pp. 1-4; see also the web site - www.mille.org.

This is clearly a Satanic counterfeit to the doctrine of the rapture of the church. They believed that the spaceship was sent to deliver them, but they needed to rid themselves of their bodies through death before they could be picked up by the ship. They also believed that after they were gone a time of purging would come upon the earth as well. The Hale-Bop comet was their sign from the heavens that the time had come.

This is also a warning to those who follow the biblical faith to be especially cautious in identifying various astronomical events, earthquakes and other “natural” phenomena as signs of the end. Reading the “end times” into these events is another way believers can be misled into date setting.

Like the Branch Davidians these groups have an elaborate, biblically-twisted view of eschatology that causes them to set dates and act in a destructive manner both towards themselves and others. It is important to recognize that often-times date setting is a signal that something else is wrong with the views of a particular interpreter or group.

Conclusion

Once again, many world events seem to point to the soon coming of our Messiah. Therefore, we must remind ourselves to approach the interpretation of prophecies usually associated with the second coming of the Messiah (the rapture, great tribulation, the anti-Christ, Gog and Magog, Armageddon, millennial kingdom, resurrection of the dead, etc.) with great caution. Many will look to us in Jewish ministry for guidance, as most believers seem to understand that the Jewish people still have a role to play in the consummation of the ages. May the Lord grant us the ability to demonstrate our excitement and eagerness for his coming, yet always tempered by sound biblical exegesis and caution.

Now, to be true to my dispensational heritage, allow me to quickly point out seven principles to guide us in our end time speculation.

1. Beware of declaring current events to be the fulfillment of end time prophecy.

This is perhaps the biggest mistake Christians have made through the ages. Certainly part of this comes from a sincere desire to see the Lord return, but these interpretive blunders have also caused grave disappointment to believers, embarrassment before non-believers and sometimes disruptive and damaging behavior. In recent years, the moral, spiritual and political climate of the world has fueled the imaginations of end-time speculators. Moral decay, the rise of nuclear weapons, a unified Europe, the events in the Middle East, the rise of China and even the rise and fall of Communism have persuaded many that we are in the last days.

We must remember that this is not the first time believers have been sure that the consummation of the ages was around the corner.

2. Beware of when you begin your chronology in determining the dates of end-time events.

One of the problems fundamental to end-time date setting is the establishing of a proper starting date for chronological and eschatological theories. Whether it is the date of creation, or the decrees in the Book of Daniel, we must be cautious in determining our starting points for all biblical chronologies. A wrong beginning can lead to a wrong end and therefore, we must be careful of where we begin our end-time speculation.

3. Beware, as oftentimes date setting and declaring a current event the fulfillment of prophecy can cause destructive, irresponsible and bizarre behavior.

This was clearly seen in the Millerite movement and with some of the Korean church groups that followed Edward Wischaupt's views on the second coming as well. And whereas the followers of Jim Jones and members of the Heaven's Gate cult were not necessarily Christians, their faulty eschatology still led to self-inflicted deaths.

4. Beware of date setting through the observance of natural phenomena in the heavens and elsewhere.

Many groups also see signs in the heavens as a way to recognize that the end is near. Even many who follow the biblical faith have been fooled into identifying various astronomical events, earthquakes and other "natural" phenomena as signs of the end. This is again a distortion of biblical truth as the signs found in passages of Scripture such as Matthew 24 and the Book of Revelation will be dramatic and unmistakable. True "birth pangs" will be as apparent to the faithful as they are to the expectant mother. For centuries we have been all too often fooled by false labor.

5. Beware of attributing eschatological significance to modern day technology.

The proliferation of nuclear weapons caused many Bible believers to speculate on the second coming. Y2K has also caused believers to act irresponsibly and in a way that has damaged families and churches. One pastor left his church and moved to the wilds of the northern United States, leaving a church in disarray.

6. Beware of date-setting fringe groups – it is often a sign of something more deeply wrong.

Date setting is oftentimes a signal that something else is wrong in the biblical and theological views of a particular interpreter or group. Historically these fringe groups have caused great disappointment and harm in the lives of those who have accepted their views. Often, as was the case with the Branch Davidians, these groups self-destruct.

7. Beware of interpreting prophecies related to the second coming traditionally understood to be future as having been fulfilled in the past.

We can be as wrong about the past as we can about the future. Viewing various second prophecies as already fulfilled can be as dangerous as interpreting every political shift as a fulfilled prophecy. Our hermeneutic cannot allow us to be literal in one instance and allegorical in another. As difficult as it may be, we must be consistent.

There are many other principles that can keep us from speculating regarding the second coming of the Messiah, but these seven provide us with a helpful start. Let me once again quote from Lewis' brilliant essay, *The World's Last Night*. Lewis writes,

We must never speak to simple, excitable people about 'the Day' without emphasizing again and again the utter impossibility of prediction. We must try to show them that that impossibility is an essential part of the doctrine. If you do not believe our Lord's words, why do you believe in His return at all? And if you do believe them must you not put away from you, utterly and forever any hope of dating that return? His teaching on the subject quite clearly consisted of three propositions. (1) That He will certainly return. (2) That we cannot possibly find out when. (3) And that therefore, we must always be ready for Him. Note the therefore. Precisely because we cannot predict the moment, we must be ready at all moments.²⁵

And though I agree with Lewis' very biblical sentiments, I am still sympathetic to the speculators. My prayer is that we will continue to grow even more zealous for his

²⁵ Lewis, p. 107.

return, as we all must live our lives in the shadow of the second coming. As John writes, “He that has this hope purifies himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:2).

And knowing these things may God motivate us to live holy lives and witness for Yeshua as if there is no tomorrow – because there might not be. As Lewis, once again, asks so poignantly, “What if this present day is the world's last night?”²⁶

Dear God, may our souls ever burn with the hope of your soon return.

²⁶ Lewis, p. 109.

Eschatology and Jewish Evangelism

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum*

Should one's eschatological position affect his view or attitude or participation in Jewish evangelism? From a purely evangelical perspective, the answer should be no. The theological basis for the mission of the church as a whole is the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. We are commanded to disciple all nations, and the Jewish people are among the "all nations" that need to be disciplined. This would be true regardless of one's eschatology. Furthermore, Romans 1:16 teaches that the gospel is not only God's power unto salvation to them that believe, it is also "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Whether one views this passage as having an historical priority or an ongoing priority to the Jews, all agree that the gospel was proclaimed to the Jew first and is the only way of salvation for both Jew and gentile. Since "faith comes by hearing," it is necessary that the gospel message be presented to both Jew and gentile. This, too, has to be true regardless of one's eschatology.

From a purely biblical and theological perspective, one's eschatology should make absolutely no difference in relationship to Jewish evangelism and evangelicals of any and all theological stripes should be willing to both do the work of Jewish evangelism and support those who are doing such a ministry.

Nevertheless, the fact is that, in practice, often one's eschatology was a motivating force for Jewish evangelism. For example, if one looks at the history of Jewish missions here in the U.S.A., a primary motivating factor was a premillennial eschatology, particularly in its dispensational form. Dispensational churches were more apt to be supporters of Jewish missions and many gentiles who entered full time Jewish missionary service came from dispensational churches. While in the recent two decades things have been changing, it is still true that much of the activity for Jewish missions and support for Jewish missions come from basic premillennial circles, both dispensational and non-dispensational.

On the other hand, on the British scene a primary motivating factor was a postmillennial theology and its strong belief in a future and national regeneration of Israel. Missionaries to Jewish people who are from Great Britain were often motivated by this brand of eschatology and were supported by those who held this perspective.

While I have clearly found that premillennial eschatology (both dispensational and non-dispensational) and postmillennial eschatology do seem to provide some kind of an eschatological motivation for Jewish evangelism, I have not found this in my studies and readings of amillennialism. This is not to say that amillennialists are not doing or

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supporting Jewish evangelism. There have been in the past and there are in the present amillennialists engaged in Jewish ministries. From my readings, they are not motivated by their eschatology, but are motivated from the general pattern of the need to evangelize and Jews should not be excluded as objects of evangelism.

Postmillennialism and Jewish Evangelism

A case in point is that of the Scottish preacher, Robert Murray McCheyne. In his discussion on the concept of the gospel to the Jew first, he wrote:

Paul glories in the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first; from which I draw this Doctrine – that the Gospel should be preached first to the Jews.

(1) Because judgment will begin with them – “Indignation and wrath to the Jew first,” Romans 2:6-10. It is an awful thought that the Jew will be the first to stand forward at the bar of God to be judged. When the great white throne is set, and he sits down upon it, from whose face the heavens and earth flee away, and great and small stand before God, is it not a striking thought that Israel – poor, blinded Israel – will be the first to stand in judgment before God?

Is this not reason, then, why the gospel should first be preached to the Jew? They are ready to perish. The cloud of indignation and wrath that is even now gathering above the lost will break first upon the head of unhappy, unbelieving Israel. And have you none of the bowels of Christ in you, that you will not run first to them that are in so sad a case?

A desperate case

In a hospital the kind physician runs first to that bed where the sick man lies who is nearest to die. When a ship is sinking, and the gallant sailors have left the shore to save the sinking crew, do they not stretch out the arm of help first to those that are readiest to perish beneath the waves? And shall we not do the same for Israel? The billows of God's anger are ready to dash first over them – shall we not seek to bring them first to the Rock that is higher than they? Their case is more desperate than that of other men – shall we not bring the Good Physician to them, who alone can bring health and cure? For the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

(2) It is like God to care first for the Jews. It is the chief glory and joy of a soul to be like God. Too many rest in the joy of being forgiven, but our truest joy is to be like him. We should be like Him in understanding, in will, in holiness, and also in his peculiar affections. “Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” But the whole Bible shows that God has a peculiar affection for Israel. You remember, when the Jews were in Egypt sorely oppressed by their taskmasters, God heard their cry, and appeared to Moses: “I have seen the affliction of my people ... and I have heard their cry, for I know their sorrows.” And, again, when God brought them through the wilderness, Moses tells them why he did it: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you” (Deut 7:7, 8). Strange, sovereign, most peculiar love! He loved them because he loved them. Should we not be like God in this peculiar attachment?

But you say, God has sent them into captivity. Now, it is true God has scattered them into every land, "The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers!" Lamentation 4:2. But what says God of this? "I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies" (Jer 12:7). It is true that Israel is given for a little moment into the hands of her enemies, but it is as true that they are still the dearly beloved of his soul. Should we not give them the same place in our heart which God gives them in his heart? Shall we be ashamed to cherish the same affection which our Heavenly Father cherishes? Shall we be ashamed to be unlike the world and like God in this peculiar love for captive Israel?

Has God cast off the Jews?

But, you say, God has cast them off. "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew." God forbid! The whole Bible contradicts such an idea. "Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isa 49:15). "And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written. There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (Rom 11:26.) Now, the simple question for much of you is, "Should we not share with God in His peculiar affection for Israel?" If we are filled with the Spirit of God, should we not love as he loves?

(3) Because they will give life to the dead world. I have often thought that a reflective traveler, passing through the countries of the world, and observing the race of Israel in every land, might be led to guess, merely from the light of his natural reason, that that singular people are preserved for some great purpose in the world. There is a singular fitness in the Jew to be the missionary of the world. They have not that peculiar attachment to home and country which we have. They are in some measure acquainted with all the languages of the world. But what says the Word of God? "It shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel, so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing" (Zech 8:13). To this day they are a curse among all nations, by their unbelief, by their covetousness; but the time is coming when they shall be as great a blessing as they have been a curse. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarryeth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men" (Micah 5:7). Just as we have found among the parched hills of Judah that the evening dew, coming silently down, gave life to every plant, making the grass to spring, and the flowers to put forth their sweetest fragrance, so shall converted Israel be when they come as dew upon a dead, dry world. "In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech 8:23). This never has been fulfilled; but, as the Word of God is true, this is true.

"Go and preach the Gospel to all nations" said the Savior. Let us obey his word like little children. All that we plead for is that in sending out missionaries to the heathen, we may not forget to begin at Jerusalem. If Paul be sent to the gentiles, let Peter be sent to the twelve tribes that are scattered abroad; and let not a by-corner in your hearts be given to this cause, let it not be an appendix to the other doings of the Church, but rather let there be written on the forefront of your hearts, "To the Jew first" and "Beginning at Jerusalem."

Pray for the Jews

Lastly, because there is a great reward. “Blessed is he that blesseth thee; cursed is he that curseth thee” (Gen 12:3). “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee” (Ps 122:6). We have felt this in our own souls. Your souls shall be enriched also if this cause finds its right place in your affections. We must not only be evangelistic, but evangelistic as God would have us to be – not only dispense the light on every hand, but dispense it first to the Jew. Then shall God revive his work in the midst of the years, and your own souls become like a well-watered garden.”²⁷

Other postmillennialists have taken a more negative attitude and one such writer is Loraine Boettner. Boettner allows for Jewish individual salvation,²⁸ but would prefer that they would disappear as a separate people, preferably by assimilation.²⁹ Because the Jews have stubbornly refused to assimilate, they have brought upon themselves antisemitism, and upon others strife and antagonism and are guilty of maintaining a distinction between Jews and gentiles.³⁰ According to Boettner, the Jews are totally to blame for their history of persecution. The problem is not with the gentiles' attitude toward the Jews, but with the Jews' failure to disappear. The solution is that the Jews should cease to be Jews, and by doing so will make a great contribution to the world. It is the Jewish failure to assimilate that has produced tragic results, both for the Jews and “for the world at large.”³¹ This is theological antisemitism with a vengeance! Needless to say, Boettner's reading of Jewish history and the history of the State of Israel is very selective, and very faulty. Based upon his limited view of the purpose of Israel's calling, Boettner asserts that “God is through with the Jews”:

It may seem harsh to say that “God is through with the Jews.” But the fact of the matter is that he is through with them as a unified national group having anything more to do with the evangelization of the world. That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church (Matt 21:43). For the past 19 centuries the Church has been the trustee of the gospel, preserving, studying, and purifying its text, and proclaiming its message to the world by means of the printed page and through the preaching of its ministers and missionaries.³²

Since God has called the Church to evangelize the world, then obviously, according to Boettner's logic, God must be finished with the Jews as a “unified national group.”

An example of one member's view of the State of Israel is also that of Boettner, who devotes a whole chapter to the subject in chapter XV, “The Jews and Palestine.” In his opening paragraph, he denounces the belief that a restoration of the Jews to the land is part of God's divine program.³³ Boettner is not very happy with the re-establishment of the Jewish state. Boettner not only blames the Jews for their own problems in the

²⁷ As quoted by Joseph Hoffman Cohn, *Beginning at Jerusalem* (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, Inc.) pp. 37-41.

²⁸ Boettner, Loraine, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1957) p. 312.

²⁹ Boettner, pp. 314-315.

³⁰ Boettner, p. 314.

³¹ Boettner, p. 315.

³² Boettner, p. 319.

³³ Boettner, p. 310.

Diaspora, but he also blames them for the problems in the Middle East.³⁴ While admitting that the Arabs are not perfect, he still puts the majority of the blame on the Jews. In harsh terminology Boettner denies that the Jews have any right whatsoever to their own land. In fact, he claims that the Jews do not belong anywhere: “The mere fact that these people are Jews does not in itself give them any more moral or legal right to Palestine than to the United States or any other part of the world.” So, the Jews don't belong anywhere! The Jews do, however, exist to this day, and this fact seems to be an embarrassment to Boettner. The continued existence of the Jews does not sit well with his form of postmillennialism. What would Boettner do with the Jews? He wants them to disappear but, fortunately, does not resort to Hitler's approach. Rather, he chooses assimilation.³⁵ To Boettner's dismay, the Jews have re-established their own country. He must therefore deny that this is in any way related to Bible prophecy or that the Jews are still a covenanted people of God.³⁶

Boettner's work was published in 1957 when Israel was quite small. Apparently, he feared that Israel might expand even to the biblical borders and so issued a disclaimer in advance:

It may be that in years to come the Jews will possess a larger part, or even all, of Palestine. We do not know. But if they do they will secure it as other nations secure property, through negotiation, or purchase, or conquest, not by virtue of any as yet unfulfilled prophecies or promises. There are no such prophecies or promises.³⁷

Therefore, the State of Israel is a work of men and not God:

As these things bear upon the re-establishment of the State of Israel, we must say that this project, carried out almost exclusively by unbelieving Jews, is not of God in the sense that it was foretold by his prophets or that his blessing is upon it. Rather it is a humanistic project, which in all probability is headed for increasingly serious trouble. Although the Jewish people have a consuming zeal for the land of Palestine, their real need is not Palestine, but Christ. And never will they find real peace, individually or as a nation, until they turn in faith to Him.³⁸

It should not be assumed that this is the only postmillennial view since other postmillennialists would have a different view of the role of Israel today. Most postmillennial writers do not share Boettner's anti-Semitic tendencies.

A cardinal belief of postmillennialism is the fact that there will be a future national salvation of Israel based upon Romans 11:25-27. While denying a national restoration of Israel, postmillennialists have generally believed in a national salvation of Israel. J. Marcellus Kik³⁹ and Iain Murray⁴⁰ have amassed documentation from many parts of Church history showing this to be the traditional view of the Church. Proponents of postmillennialism believe “In Romans xi.25, Paul teaches that the national conversion

³⁴ Boettner, p. 314-315.

³⁵ Boettner, p. 315.

³⁶ Boettner, p. 321.

³⁷ Boettner, p. 321.

³⁸ Boettner, pp. 382-383.

³⁹ Kik, J. Marcellus, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 8-14.

⁴⁰ Murray, Iain H., *The Puritan Hope* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), pp. 41-50, 78-177.

of the Jews is not to take place ‘until the fullness of the gentiles be come in.’⁴¹ In Covenant postmillennialism the salvation of Israel is a necessary prerequisite to the Second Coming: “The second great event, which, according to the common faith of the Church, is to precede the second advent of Christ, is the national conversion of the Jews.”⁴² Hodge first agrees that there will be a national salvation of the Jews and defends his thesis in four points.⁴³ His four arguments for Israel's national salvation can be summarized as follows. First, previous prophecies concerning the Jews have been literally fulfilled, so it is natural to expect that the future prophecy of Israel's national salvation will also be literally fulfilled. Second, there has been a continuous cycle in which Israel disobeys God, is punished for disobedience, which leads to Israel's repentance, and that, in turn, brings restoration. Israel's present dispersion and suffering is a punishment for rejecting the Messiah. This last cycle will only be completed by Israel's national salvation and restoration to the Lord. Third, there are clear prophecies in the Old Testament that predict a national salvation, such as Zechariah 12:10-13:1. Fourth, it is also the teaching of the New Testament in Romans 11. Hodge concludes: “There is, therefore, to be a national conversion of the Jews.” On this point covenant premillennialists and dispensationalists will largely agree with Hodge; however, covenant amillennialists will not.

Kik interprets these verses as speaking of a literal Israel, and, therefore, of the “conversion of Israel after the flesh.”⁴⁴ This national conversion of Israel will take place after the mass conversion of the gentiles, and it will result in riches for the gentiles. Iain Murray shows that this passage was the basis for the Puritan hope for a national salvation and defends that position with his own exegesis.⁴⁵

Turning to postmillennial commentaries, they support the traditional postmillennial view of Romans 11:25-33. Verses 25-26 are especially relevant to Israelology in general, and important for postmillennial Israelology. In verse 25, Paul wrote: “For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the gentiles be come in”. Hodge takes this verse to mean:

*a great and general conversion of the Jewish people, which should take place when the fulness of the Gentiles had been brought in, and that then, and not till then, those prophecies should be fully accomplished which speak of the salvation of Israel.*⁴⁶

While affirming a future conversion of the Jews as a nation, Hodge did not believe that this would include every individual Jew.⁴⁷ The key issue here is the meaning of Paul's phrase, until the fullness of the gentiles be come in. Hodge interprets the phrase to refer to a mass conversion of gentiles in the last days.⁴⁸ Hodge's outline of the future is simple. First, Israel's blindness will continue until there is a mass turning of gentiles

⁴¹ Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (London: James Clarke & Co., 1960), 3:803.

⁴² Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:805.

⁴³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:805-807.

⁴⁴ Kik, pp. 28, 75-76, 81.

⁴⁵ Murray, pp. 61-79.

⁴⁶ Hodge, Charles, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1886), p. 371.

⁴⁷ Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 373.

⁴⁸ Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 373-374.

to Christ. Second, after this mass turning of gentiles, Israel's blindness will be removed and she will be saved as a nation.

John Murray⁴⁹ shows the importance of what Paul is about to say by emphasizing the “mystery” aspect of it. It is this aspect of the truth that makes what follows a great and precious truth. Second, the content of this mystery which has been hidden in the mind of God but now revealed is that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fullness of the gentiles be come in . . . (v. 25). Murray points out the two things which he has felt is the point of Romans 11 all along: first, the “hardening of Israel is partial not total”; and, second, it is “temporary not final.” The end product will be the salvation of Israel, already implied several times earlier. Third, Israel's “partial hardening . . . will have a terminus,” and this terminus is when the fullness of the gentiles be come in. Fourth, the “fullness of the gentiles” involves two things. First, it involves “enlarged blessings for the gentiles.” Second, since “be come in,” according to Murray, means “entering into the kingdom of God and life,” it speaks of “gentiles entering into the kingdom of God”; the “fullness” includes the concept of a mass of gentiles entering into this kingdom still future to Paul's day. Murray then proceeds to give his interpretation as to the meaning of all Israel.⁵⁰ The expression all Israel shall be saved is interpreted by Murray to be the national salvation of Israel, or in Murray's words, “the fullness, the receiving, the ingrafting of Israel as a people, the restoration of Israel to gospel favour and blessing and the correlative turning of Israel from unbelief to faith and repentance.” However, Murray does not interpret “all” to mean every Jew living after the fullness of the gentiles be come in. His reasoning is that “the salvation of Israel must be conceived of on a scale that is commensurate with their trespass, their loss, their casting away, their breaking off, and their hardening, commensurate, of course, in the opposite direction.” In other words, when God cast off Israel, He did not include every individual Jew, for there was a remnant according to the election of grace. It did include the majority of the Jews, however. By the same token, all Israel means that the majority will be saved, but a minority will persist in unbelief. It is the “mass of Israel” that will be saved. What Murray does not take into consideration is the fact that the term all was not used with casting away. Paul never said “the casting away of all of them.” He consistently maintained that (1) God has not cast away His people; (2) the majority have not believed in the Messiahship of Jesus; and, (3) a minority or a remnant have believed. In light of the absence of a “casting all away,” it might very well mean that all Jews of that time will be saved. Furthermore, Paul has been making another contrast besides that of Jews and gentiles. The second contrast has been between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. As this contrast was developed, it included the concept that during this time only “some” Jews believe; but in the future “all” Jews will believe. Murray's final point on the issue of all Israel will be saved is that this phrase cannot be interpreted as merely “the relative proportion of saved Jews in the final accounting of God's judgment,” an amillennial interpretation. This event is a future one.

It is this firm belief of a future national turning of Israel that was a motivating force on the part of some postmillennialists to enter into the field of Jewish evangelism.

⁴⁹ Murray, John, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), 2:91-94.

⁵⁰ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:98.

Amillennialism and Jewish Evangelism

On the one hand, amillennialists do not have any special eschatology involving ethnic Israel, but on the other hand, they do affirm the need of the Jews to believe in the gospel for salvation. These two elements have basically tempered their views of the significance of Israel and the need for the gospel. One example of this perspective is as follows.

Covenant amillennialists deny that Israel today has any biblical right to the land. Oswald Allis raises the issue in his preface.⁵¹ It is important to note that his work was first published in 1945, soon after the Nazi Holocaust, but before Israel became a state in 1948. Allis allows his covenant amillennial theology to determine his view of a national home for the Jews. Because the idea of a national restoration of Israel is foreign to this theology, Allis is opposed to this on any grounds: religious, political, or social. Branding the Jew as a “world problem,” Allis denies that the solution to the problem is a national home for the Jews. For Allis, the problem is not the lack of a national Jewish homeland, but because “he rejected the Messiah promised to his race.” Because of this rejection, the Jew was “scattered among the nations’ as a punishment for his sin.” According to Allis, the reason the Jew remains a “world problem” is because “he still continues in unbelief and yet still regards himself as a ‘peculiar people,’ whose destiny is to rule the earth under a Messiah who is yet to come.” Allis either ignores or is ignorant that even in 1945 most Jews were no longer Orthodox and had given up the belief in a Messiah yet to come. For the most part, the Jews were not concerned with ruling the earth, but escaping murderous persecution like the one in which six million had only recently died. From another perspective, the “Jewish problem” was not with the Jews, but with the gentiles who refused to leave the Jews alone and, more often than not, “in Jesus’ name.”

Allis' solution is that in place of a Jewish national home, “the hope of the Jew” is “to be found in the acceptance by him of the gospel of the grace of God which the Church has been commanded to proclaim to all nations, that gospel of the Cross . . .,” for the Jew has no future independent of the Church. The “supreme need” of the Jew is the “heavenly salvation” which is found only in the Christian Church.

Because of his amillennial approach, Allis sets up an either/or proposition. The option is that the “Christian statesman and the Christian churchman” must either support Zionism, or “offer the Jew salvation within her fold.” Allis is a good example of someone whose theology definitely colors his thinking about the Jewish question. Allis is correct when he states that the “answer given by the churchman will determine his conception of the duty of the Church toward the Jew,” and that the “answer given by Christian statesmen will determine their attitude toward Zionism and the political and national aspirations which it fosters and hopes to realize.”

This sets the tone for the way Allis treats Israelology throughout his work, especially rejecting the dispensational approach to the same topic. His Israelology is sometimes tinged with antisemitism. In a chapter entitled, “The Jewish Remnant,” Allis reveals clearly what he dislikes about Dispensationalism:

⁵¹ Allis, Oswald T., *Prophecy and the Church* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1945; reprint ed., 1974), vii-ix.

*For in saying this he has placed his finger on the sore point in Dispensational teaching, the exaltation of the Jew per se. In their glorification of the Jew and the rosy future they assign to him, Dispensationalists vie with Zionists. The future belongs to the Jew!*⁵²

For Allis, the dispensational position on a future for Israel, the Jewish people, is “the sore point.” This is not the first time that Allis has linked Dispensationalism with Zionism in a negative way. Again, it is hard to escape the feeling that Allis is anti-Semitic which, to a large extent, helped determine his theology.

It is not the kind of eschatology that would promote Jewish evangelism. However, the belief in salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone should be a motivating factor to evangelize the Jews. But nothing in Allis' writings seems to encourage any form of Jewish evangelism.

Whereas Romans 11:25-27 appears to be a motivating force for postmillennialism, it could not be so used for amillennialism since they do not interpret it as a future mass turning of the Jewish people. For amillennialists, the “all Israel” either refers to the Church of both Jews and gentiles or it simply is the sum total of all members of the Jewish Remnant being saved between the First and Second Comings. This is now in the process of being fulfilled and, therefore, it is not a future eschaton. Obviously, the lack of an eschatology would not be a motivating force for Jewish evangelism among amillennialists. Therefore, what would motivate those of this camp to enter Jewish evangelism is the fact that the Jews, like any other ethnic group, need to have the gospel presented to them. Thus William Hendriksen states:

*It has become very clear, therefore, that the proposition, “God is finished with the Jews,” is an error. God has his elect people among the Africans, the Indian tribes, the French, the Dutch, the Mexicans, the Argentineans, the Australians, and so forth; and certainly also, he has his elect among the Jews!*⁵³

So here is the amillennial motivation for Jewish evangelism. God has His elect among the Jews as He has His elect among other ethnic groups and that will be the grounds for some amillennialists entering Jewish missions.

Perhaps a good example of what would motivate an amillennialist to be involved in Jewish evangelism is that of Anthony Hoekema. In his comment on Romans 11:26 he states:

*The sign of the salvation of the fulness of Israel, . . . tells us that Jews will continue to be converted to Christianity throughout the entire era between the first and second comings of Christ, as the full number of the Gentiles is being gathered in. In such Jewish conversions, therefore, we are to see a sign of the certainty of Christ's return. In the meantime, this sign should bind on our hearts the urgency of the church's mission to the Jews. In a world in which there is still a great deal of anti-Semitism, let us never forget that God has not rejected his ancient covenant people, and that he still has his purpose with Israel.*⁵⁴

His conclusion is that Jews will always be coming to Christ, and this should be a spur to Jewish evangelism. This is “the urgency of the church's mission to the Jews.”

⁵² Allis, p. 219.

⁵³ Hendriksen, William, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 52.

⁵⁴ Hoekema, Anthony A., *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979; revised ed., 1982), p. 147.

God “still has his purpose with Israel,” but for Hoekema, this purpose neither includes a national salvation nor a national restoration, only a remnant salvation. Even with the sum total of all remnants, it is still partial.

Premillennialism and Jewish Evangelism

For a premillennialist, especially those of the dispensational type, there appears to be a double theological motivation for Jewish evangelism. The first is the fact of the existence of a present-day Jewish remnant. Romans 9:6 was interpreted as distinguishing two Israels, between Jews who believe and Jews who do not believe. Romans 11:1-19 taught there was in existence a present-day remnant. Romans 11:25 stated that a hardness in part had befallen Israel, and because it is only a partial hardening, therefore, there will always be Jewish people coming to believe in Jesus. The guarantee of a present-day remnant was one theological (though not particularly eschatological) motivation for people from this school of thought to enter or support Jewish missions.

The second motivating factor had to do with the fact of a future national salvation of Israel, but also the fact of how God was viewed as using Israel during the tribulation. For example, some of the writings published by Joseph Hoffman Cohn of the then American Board of Missions to the Jews and by Dr. David L. Cooper of Biblical Research Society were focused on the need to reach the 144,000 Jews with the gospel. The thinking was that these would be witnessed to at the present time through Jewish evangelism, though they would not accept the gospel until after the Rapture, and they are the ones who would proclaim the gospel throughout the world during the tribulation. Because they are merely referred to as “first fruits,” they are, therefore, the first fruits of the national salvation that will happen at the end of the tribulation. A zealotness to be part of God's prophetic program motivated people from within this camp to enter Jewish missions to be the ones to bring Jewish people into the remnant today and perhaps be used indirectly for the future salvation of the 144,000 Jews and/or Israel's national salvation.

Conclusion

If the question is asked - Should eschatology make a difference in motivating someone to enter or support Jewish evangelism? - on a purely theological, biblical and doctrinal basis, the answer should be no. If one's eschatology does not motivate him to be in or support Jewish evangelism, his soteriology should if for no other reason that God has his elect among the Jews as among other peoples and, therefore, evangelists should be sent out because faith comes by hearing.

If the question is asked differently - Has one's eschatology affected his entering and/or supporting Jewish evangelism? - the answer appears to be yes. And yet, no one eschatology can claim a monopoly here. If a specific eschatology has been most influential in promoting Jewish missions on the American scene, it does not necessarily make it true for other parts of the world. While most Jewish believers today tend to be premillennial, there are also amillennial and postmillennial Jewish believers who are also actively involved in front-line Jewish missions. If there is one theology whose

eschatology is least likely to promote Jewish evangelism, it would probably be amillennialism. However, we are only talking about its eschatology. While their soteriology may not promote Jewish missions as being anything special or unique, it does promote Jewish missions as being one of equal options with other ethnic groups.

If the question is asked - Is there eschatology that negates or down plays evangelism? - I do not believe any eschatology down-plays or negates, though some may promote Jewish evangelism more than others. None of the three broad schools of eschatology promote antisemitism, yet antisemitism can be found in all three divisions and it is that element within all three divisions of eschatology that would desire to negate Jewish evangelism. This is not due to their specific eschatology, but due to their own prejudices that might lead to their ignoring the emphasis of the eschatology they claim to hold.

Eschatology and Jewish Evangelism

Joseph Shulam*

Eschatology has played a very important role in evangelism world-wide, but it has especially been important in all that is related to Israel and the Jewish people. Christian theologians since the 15th century have related Jewish evangelism to the end of days. There have been people like John Milton, and George Elliot, and John Toland, and Ephraim Gothold Lessing, and many more who believed in the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel as a sign that the return of Jesus is imminent. In Germany, Michael Hanh also held that God would fulfill his promises to Israel and establish once more the Jewish Reich in Israel with the coming of the Messiah. All these great men and women loved God and loved his Word – they believed God's Word and his promises, and therefore they believed that the prophetic word to Israel will be fulfilled by God. In our own days we are witnessing the phenomena of Christian Zionism – that is also based on latent or not so latent eschatological motives. I say these things because of a very deep concern related to eschatology and the Jewish people. Christian eschatology has a history of disappointments. The tension that bad eschatology creates in people is a dangerous thing that can boomerang and turn to devour those who partake of it. Evangelical Christianity's love affair with Israel is a very young phenomenon that became popular only after the 1967 Six Days War. Young love affairs tend to disappear just as fast as they come up on the stage of history. For this reason it seems to me that dealing with this subject is both important and dangerous.

Evangelism and Charity Should be Done only for Their Own Sake

The command, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned,” (Mark 16:15-16) does not have any other reason or motive attached to it than teaching the Good News. Any time that we attach to evangelism other reasons or motivations than those given to us in the Word of God we are treading on thin ice.

In Jewish evangelism in particular one should be careful not to reinforce the classic accusation that the Jewish community has against those who have believed in Yeshua as the Messiah: that they believe for ulterior motives. Evangelism is a valuable enough

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command of our Lord so we do not need eschatological reasons to preach the Good News to Jews or to anyone else, for that matter.

We do not give charity or love for ulterior reasons and we ought not to engage in evangelism for other reasons than our love for people and obedience to the Lord.

The Motive for Evangelism Has to Be only One: Salvation of Souls

The message of the New Testament is really very simple – Matthew 18:12-13:

For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

We are servants of God and we have the calling and the responsibility for his sheep. This is why we preach the Good News and want to see souls saved. What would happen if we knew that the Messiah is not coming soon! Would we stop preaching the Good News that Israel and the world have a Savior?

Maimonides' statement in *Mishne Torah* has a great merit for Christians as well:

1. King Messiah will arise and restore David's realm to its former status, its original sovereignty.

2. Do not suppose that King Messiah will have to perform signs and wonders, create new things in the world, revive the dead, or similar acts. It is not so. Rabbi Akiva was a great sage, one of the authors of the Mishnah, yet he was the right-hand man of Ben Koziva, the ruler, whom he thought to be King Messiah. He and all the sages of his generation imagined Bar Kohkba to be King Messiah until he was unfortunately slain. Once he was slain, it dawned on them that he was not Messiah. Yet the sages had not asked him for an omen or a wonder. Basically, things are as follows: This Torah of ours, its statutes and laws, will never be subject to change. Nothing is to be added to or taken away from them. Whoever has added or taken away anything or has misinterpreted the Torah and rendered the commands in opposition to their literal sense is an impostor, a sinful man, a heretic.

3. If a king will arise from the house of David, a student of Torah, performing good deeds like his ancestor David, in the spirit of both the Written and the Oral Torah, and prevail upon all Israel to reinstate the Torah and to follow its direction, and will fight the battles of the Lord, he will presumably be the Messiah. If he has done these things and succeeded, having overcome the surrounding enemy nations and rebuilt the sanctuary on its site and gathered the dispersed of Israel, he will certainly be the Messiah. If he has not succeeded to such an extent, or has been slain, it is certain that he is not the one concerning whom the Torah has assured us.

The sages have declared: "The only difference between the present world and the Messianic era is our present subjection to foreign power" (Berachoth 34b). From a literal interpretation of the Prophets it appears that at the beginning of the messianic age the war of God and Magog will be launched, and that prior to that war a prophet will arise among the people of Israel to keep their heart steadfast. As it is written: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet" (Mal 3:23). He will come only to establish peace in the world, as it written: "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers." Some of the sages declare that Elijah will appear

before the advent of King Messiah. No person is in a position to know how all these things and their like will happen until they eventually take place. They are mentioned by the prophets vaguely, not explicitly. Nor have the sages any traditional knowledge concerning these matters, except what they gather from the implication of the biblical verses. Hence, there is disagreement among them on this subject. At any rate, neither the sequences of these events nor their minute details are of basic importance in religion. One should never deal with legendary topics, nor stretch midrashic statements on these and similar subjects. He should not consider them essential, since they do not lead to love and reverence for God. Nor should one reckon the end of days from biblical indications. The sages have said: "Let despair come to those who make calculations of the end of days" (Sanh. 97b). One should rather hopefully wait, and believe in the principles of things, as we have explained.

This is the standard Jewish position on eschatology and I think that it is a healthy position. Jewish people in general are not involved in extreme eschatological expectations – they are involved in planting olive trees, and in rebuilding the land of Israel from a waste land into a blooming garden. Christians would do much better and be more successful in their outreach in Israel if they joined with the Jewish people in helping the Jewish nation build up the land and also supporting the Messianic Jews in their witness of Yeshua as the lover of Israel – not only the "savior of Israel."

Only One Method of Evangelism: Teach God's Living Word

All commands and examples of evangelism in the New Testament are examples of teaching, and proclaiming the Word of God.

We do not have any example of New Testament preaching a message other than the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah of Israel. The message that made both the Jews and the Greeks stand up and listen was the message of the cross of Yeshua. There was no "doomsday" eschatological manipulation of the crowds in Jerusalem, or in Antioch, or in Corinth. What was preached was one God who loved the world and sent his Son to save us all by his faith and mercy to all. Why can we not repeat the same message with the same expectation and the same success? I will tell you why this cannot be repeated in our day – because there are 2000 years of division and hate spread by Christian churches for the last 1800 years. Until the Christian churches and denominations will change their general attitude toward Israel and the Jewish people, and toward the Torah, the people of Israel will not want to listen to their offer of "salvation."

Even if we knew for sure that the Lord is not coming for the next 1000 years, we should still evangelize the Jews and all mankind. Building artificial eschatological expectations based on speculative interpretations of Scriptures has not proven effective or beneficial to any group of people and much less so to the Jewish people. Every time in our history when such expectations have been fostered calamity was waiting for us at the door. We should wait for the Messiah to come at any moment like a thief in the night. We should be ready and have our lamps full of oil in case he delays. But, we should not use our speculations of the second coming of the Messiah as a tool to scare people into believing that Yeshua is the Messiah.

Evangelizing the Jews is different only because of the special relationship that God has to our history. Preaching the Good News to Israel and to the Jewish people is not like preaching to all the other nations in the following way:

Jews are the elect people of God and they have promises of salvation given to them as a nation. These promises are in both the New and the Old Testaments, which means that the evangelist should be much more humble in relation to bringing the Good News to Israel.

Jews have seen the ugly side of so called “Christianity” for more than a millennium, and when we preach to Jews we ought to make every effort to present the Messiah without influencing Jews to break the laws of the Torah or Jewish tradition. It is wrong to teach Jews against keeping and observing their traditions and the Torah. It is Yeshua himself who said: “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:19).

Jews should be preaching to Jews in a Jewish way. I know that many of the present leadership of the Messianic movement are non-Jews and non-Jews witnessed to many of the Jews in the movement. I know that many of us were “saved” in evangelical churches. But, with all this said and done, there is still the ideal situation and the best conditions for evangelism. I am looking toward the future and asking myself what and how should we reach the Jewish people with the Good News. My answer to these questions is that while we are entering this new Millennium we should change some of our attitudes toward Jewish evangelism and seek first the good of the Kingdom of God and only second or third or fourth the good of our particular ministry and denomination.

It is important to note that the phrase “life from the dead” found in Romans 11:15 is not necessarily to be understood eschatologically. There are other ways to understand this phrase and to interpret it in light of passages like Ephesians 2:1, 11; Colossians 2:13, and others.

The Blessing of the Engrafting

Paul brings out the full implications of God's purpose to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham. Not only did he choose a people for himself from Abraham's seed but he also made that people jealous when they forsook their own God and saw those who formerly had not been a nation (Deut 32:21) - not merely not part of Israel but without hope and without God in the world (cf. Eph 2:12) - become part of God's kingdom, and thus returned to him in faithfulness. The life that God gave to the gentile nations thus becomes eternal life for both Israel and the gentile believers; Israel's partial rejection of God's Messiah brings God's reconciliation to the gentile nations (cf. Rom 5:10-11). Although Israel have “transgressed,” “failed,” and “rejected” God's righteousness in Yeshua their (partial) rejection leads to “riches for the world,” “riches for the Gentiles,” “fulfillment,” “reconciliation,” and “life from the dead.” Israel's “fulfillment” - their redemption in Yeshua - brings the gentiles an even greater blessing. Not only will God reconcile them to himself (cf. Rom 5:10-11), but he who “gives life to the dead” will also “call into being” (cf. Rom 4:17) a people who did not exist. Paul's analogy, moreover, suggests how the gentiles' obedience will provoke Israel to jealousy for their own God and bring their “fulfillment” and salvation. He interprets the verse in Genesis 12:3 (cf. 18:18), “And in you (Abraham) all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” by playing on the meaning given to the root *barakh* in Second Temple

literature. Through the influence of the Aramaic form, one part of the verb was used to refer to the process of “grafting” or “sinking” of a plant, especially that of a vine, by drawing it into the ground and thus making it grow forth as an independent plant. Paul interprets the blessing in Genesis as the “grafting” of the gentiles, in a similar fashion to R. Eleazar's interpretation of the same verse, in which the blessing returns upon the people of Israel. Eleazar further stated:

What is meant by the text, And in thee shall the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12.3)? The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, 'I have two goodly shoots [lit. 'blessings'] to engraft [lit. 'make blessing'] on you: Ruth the Moabitess and Naamah the Ammonitess'. All the families of the earth, even the other families who live on the earth are blessed only for Israel's sake. All the nations of the earth (Gen.18.18), even the ships that go from Gaul to Spain are blessed only for Israel's sake (Yev.63a).

The Sin Nature and *Yetzer Har'a*: Are they the Same or Different?

Louis Goldberg*

In the past two years, when discussing basic biblical theology with Messianic Jewish brethren, this writer has asked whether the biblical concept of the sin nature is different from the Jewish concept of *yetzer har'a* or “evil inclination.” Some affirm that both are the same. Recently, after having reviewed Shulam and de Cornu's commentary on Romans,⁵⁵ except for a footnote where Shulam cautiously explains a possible support for the “Christian doctrine” of the sin nature, his assessment also is that Paul's primary discussion on what is understood as the sin is based on man's struggle with his *yetzer har'a*. Believers must continually fight it so as to have victory in the everyday experience of living for the Messiah.

The Yetzer Har'a

The identity of the *yetzer har'a*

The Evil Inclination an Act of Sin. This phenomenon is affirmed as an act of sin within each human being. According to rabbinical citations: “The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Gen 6:5);⁵⁶ after the flood he declared, “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood” (Gen 8:21; note also Deut 31:21; Eccles 7:20).

Origin of the yetzer har'a. Does a person acquire this inclination at conception, or does it appear at a later date? And, does everyone possess this *yetzer*? A well known *tanna* had noted:

Antoninus also inquired of Rabbi (Yehudah)(tanna, 2/3rd century), 'From what time does the evil yeser hold sway over man; from the formation (of the embryo), or from (its) issuing forth (into the light of the world)?'

'From the formation,' he replied. 'If so,' he objected, "it would rebel in its mother's womb and go forth. But it is from when it issues.' Rabbi said: "This thing Antoninus taught me, and Scripture supports him, for it is said, At the door (i.e., where the babe emerges) sin lies in wait (Gen 4:7) (Sanhedrin 91b).⁵⁷

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⁵⁵ Joseph Shulam, *A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans* (Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1997).

⁵⁶ All Scripture citations are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁷ In the *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin*, Vol. III, H. Freedman, tr. (London: Soncino Press, 1935), p. 612.

From this high rabbinical source and what follows thereafter, the tradition is that the rabbis did affirm sin to be an act within man, beginning at the moment of birth, and is not transmitted from the mother to the son or daughter.

What is this yetzer?

An interesting interpretation. A remarkable phenomenon is in the way the word “formed” is spelled, *vayyitzer*, with two *yods*, and the translation is, “And the Lord God formed man” (Gen. 2:7). The rabbis have interpreted this word interestingly, declaring that because of the two *yods*, God created man with two inclinations, the evil as well as the good (Berachoth 61a).⁵⁸ Hertz noted that in the creation of the animals, only one *yod* appears (*vayitzer*)(Gen 2:19),⁵⁹ and therefore, most rabbis have felt that living creatures do not have an either good or evil inclination.

The heart is the scene of action. The Rabbis were also interested in the heart as the place of activity by the inclinations to evil or good. At times, the word, “heart” is spelled with two *bets*, *levav*, signifying a double portion or even a double-mindedness. When only one *bet*, (*lev*), appears, the word is understood as single-mindedness. The argument in the Hebrew commentary, Sifre, on Deuteronomy, in the command, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart,” *bekhal lebabekha*, is interpreted to mean, “With both your Inclinations, the Inclination to good and the Inclination to evil”⁶⁰

Furthermore, Vizner describes the *yetzer* as human motivation and thought in general, as in the verse: “For God searches all hearts and He understands every *yetzer*” (1 Chron 28:9). “Thus, the *yetzer* is regarded as the motivator of human actions – for better or worse – for which the physical body is but an instrument.”⁶¹

The freedom of will is paramount

By the Intertestamental period, Jewish thought recognized the two concepts of predestination by God and man’s freedom of will, tried to keep both of them in balance, and yet the majority of religious leaders were also very emphatic on insisting upon man’s responsibility for his choices. Thus, “Before a man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given to him” (Eccles 15:17; see also vss. 11-16),⁶² and, “Our works (are) in the choosing and power of our souls, to do right and wrong in the works of our hands” (Psalms of Solomon 9:4).⁶³

The rabbinical teaching in the second century CE followed the same lines, especially in the familiar words ascribed to Akiva, “All is foreseen, but freedom of choice is given (to man); and the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the excess of works

⁵⁸ In the *Hebrew English Edition, Babylonian Talmud, Seder Zeraim*, M. Simon, tr. (London: Soncino, 1960), n. p.

⁵⁹ *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, Hebrew Text, English Translations and Commentary, H. Hertz, ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1952), pp. 7, 9.

⁶⁰ Sifre, *A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, Piska 32, Reuven Hammer, tr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 59 and *The Mishnah*, H. Danby, ed. (London: Oxford, 1933), p. 10.

⁶¹ Naftali Tsevi Vizner, *In His Own Image: A Study of the Human Soul and the Personal Struggle Between Good and Evil* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1992), p. 83.

⁶² *The Apocrypha of the Old Testament* (R.S.V.), (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1957), p. 126.

⁶³ *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, James H. Charlesworth, ed. (Garden City, NY: New York, 1985), p. 660.

[that it be good or evil]” (Abot 3:16).⁶⁴ The Gemara echoes this idea, Rav and others exclaim, “Did you not give us the evil *yetzer* in order to reward us” (Yoma 69b),⁶⁵ and Moore noted with reference to b. Niddah 16b, “God and his providence determines beforehand what a man shall be and what shall befall him, but never his course of action. whether he shall be godly or godless, righteous or wicked” (Niddah 16b).⁶⁶ The first Jewish philosopher, Saadia Gaon, wrote that one has joy in the reward for performing a mitzvah which represents an effort to subdue the *yetzer har’a* (Emunot VeDeot).⁶⁷

The Acts of the *Yetzer Har’a*

Man as a rebel

Schechter stated that “Sin and disobedience are conceived as defiance and rebellion.”⁶⁸ The generations of Enoch, the Flood as well as those who built the Tower of Babel are rebels. Some of the kings of Judah, Ahaz, Amon, and Jehoiakim spited God (Sanhedrin 103b).⁶⁹ Rebellious people throw off the yoke of the omnipresent One or heaven (Sifre 93a: Sanhedrin 111b),⁷⁰ and this is regarded as removing “the covenant made by God with Israel on Mount Sinai.”⁷¹ The most prominent rebels were in “The generations of the deluge, and people of Sodom and Gomorrah,” considered guilty of three major sins: idolatry, adultery, and the shedding of blood.⁷² In any one of these cardinal sins, the land becomes contaminated, the name of God is profaned, and the risk of the (temporary) loss of Shekinah and exile of the people is present. That possibility was realized when a generation of Judeans was sent to Babylon. The same sins were present when the second Temple was lost, although the full effects of this disaster were not fully realized until some 600 years later, with the Muslim invasion of the Middle East, which then led to a full Arabizing of the land of Israel.

The cardinal sins already mentioned, along with blasphemy and slander, are designated “evil things.”⁷³ And so, in the judgment, scoffers, liars, and hypocrites, will be excluded from the divine presence (Sanhedrin 103a).⁷⁴ Rebellion against God is

⁶⁴ In *Mishna Nezikin, The Mishnah*, H. Danby, ed. (London: Oxford, 1933) p. 452.

⁶⁵ In the Hebrew English Edition, *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Moed*, Leo Jung, tr. (1974), n.p.

⁶⁶ George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1955), p. 456, and also in the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Tohoroth, I.W. Slotki, tr. (London: Soncino, 1948), p. 111

⁶⁷ Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Samuel Rosenblatt, tr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976 copyright), p. 360.

⁶⁸ Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, (New York: Behrman House, 1936), p. 219).

⁶⁹ In the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Vol. III, pp. 703, 704.

⁷⁰ In Sifre, Op. Cit., Piska 93, page 141; and in the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Vol. III, Op. Cit., page 768.

⁷¹ Schechter, p. 220.

⁷² Schechter, p. 222f.

⁷³ Sifre, Piska 254, p. 255.

⁷⁴ In the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Vol. III, p. 21

serious, denying the very worth or existence of God, his providence, his authority, and even going so far as to exclude him from the world itself.⁷⁵

Warning by leaders

The rabbis warn against the intentions of the evil inclination, not only against the overt acts, but one must also be aware of its subtle ways: this inclination is the modest traveler, who becomes the welcome guest, and finally, it becomes the cruel taskmaster as the master of the house of the soul (Gen. Rabba, 22:6).⁷⁶ In another description, the *yetzer har'a* entangles the person, at first, in a very insignificant and light way, even as the thin thread of a cobweb, but then it becomes a strong rope, making it impossible in the end for one to be free (Gen. Rabbah, 22:6).⁷⁷

Why the presence of the *yetzer har'a*?

Vizner points out that “Our sages assure us that there is a positive side to the fact that God created man with *yetzer har'a*, for its very presence in man is a reason to mitigate his punishment for sinning” and cites a Talmud source according to R. Hama, “If not for several verses that tell that the Almighty placed the *yetzer har'a* in our soul, the legs of our enemies would totter at the judgment.” This affirms that God should not be held responsible for causing a person to sin. Another source explains:

*It is not proper to claim that we have an excuse, for man is given free choice ... We have somewhat of an excuse on the day of judgment, and our case won't collapse entirely, since He created the yetzer har'a that caused us to sin. Thus it is fitting that we should be victorious in our judgment (Maharsha, commentary Berachot, ibid.).*⁷⁸

What is interesting, concerning the statement, “If you will it, I shall not sin; none shall escape you” (Job 10:7), (although the literal translation is, “According to your knowledge, I am indeed not guilty, yet there is no deliverance from your hand,” NASV), Vizner cites *Rashi* in a comment, “Job tried to annul the judgment of the entire world by proclaiming ‘We were forced [to sin] because of the *yetzer har'a* that You created. If You willed it, I would not have done evil’” (*Baba Batra* 16a).⁷⁹

From this discussion, even the rabbis realized that if God created this *yetzer har'a*, a person is fully responsible for the deeds he or she chooses, even though they are wrong. God had a purpose for this burden he placed on mankind.

Some have even gone so far as to say that the evil inclination is really not that evil! If it were not for the evil impulse, no man could build a house, marry a wife, have children, or engage in trade. Scripture declared “All labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor” (Eccles 4:4, Gen Rabba 9:7; and Eccles Rabba on Eccles 3:11).⁸⁰ So, the passions within a man are an extremely essential element,

⁷⁵ Schechter, p. 233.

⁷⁶ Genesis Rabba Vol. I, H. Freedman, tr. (London, Soncino, n.d.), p. 185.

⁷⁷ Gen. Rabba.

⁷⁸ Vizner, p. 90.

⁷⁹ Vizner, as well as in the *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin*, Vol. II., M. Simon., tr., (1935), pp. 79, 80.

⁸⁰ In Gen. Rabba, Vol. I, H. Freedman, tr., P. 68, and in *Midrash Rabba, Ruth, Eccl. Vol. 8* (London: Soncino, 1939), pp. 91, 92.

necessary for the continuation of the race and for the existence of civilization and this inclination should then be directed and controlled (Sanhedrin 107b; Sotah 47a).⁸¹

How Does One Subdue the Yetzer Har'a?

Rabbinical theology affirmed a number of facets to control this yetzer:

Yetzer hatov

The argument in Sifre, on Deuteronomy, in the command, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart,” (*bekhal lebabekha*) is interpreted to mean, “With both your Inclinations, the Inclination to good and the Inclination to evil.” (Mishna Berakot 9:5).⁸² The only problem is that the evil inclination appears already at birth while the *yetzer hatov* is not activated until the boy becomes a *bar mitzvah*; the inclination to evil already has a head start.

So as to enable one to have victory over the *yetzer har'a*, an example is provided from a midrash from the following passage: “Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom” (Eccles 4:13, 14).

The interpretation follows, “Better is a poor and wise youth” – this is the *yetzer hatov*, called as such since the *yetzer hatov* can only begin its influence from the age of 13. It lacks seniority over the *yetzer har'a*. It is poor because not all obey it. But, the child is wise and can teach people the right way to go. The old and foolish king is the evil inclination, called a king because, unfortunately, people can be influenced by it and nearly everyone will obey it. It is old because it attaches itself to a person from the time of birth, and foolish because the evil inclination comes to people in many roundabout ways, teaching them the wrong way to go; thus he establishes himself in the kingdom that belongs to the good inclination.⁸³

When one chooses to follow the *yetzer hatov* over a long period of time, he or she can be better prepared to withstand the temptations of the evil inclination. “Run to fulfill the lightest duty even as the weightiest, and flee from transgression; for one duty draws another in its train, and one transgression draws another in its train” (*Abot* 4:2).⁸⁴ With frequent use of the good inclination, it becomes much easier for a person to overcome the evil one; even then, however, the struggle between the two goes on and at times it can be excruciating.

Other means to subdue the yetzer har'a

Wisdom as a guide. The guidelines in Proverbs and the Wisdom of Sirach enable one to overcome his or her evil inclination. Wisdom is an excellent resource to control appetizing passions by recognizing the consequences of questionable behavior and

⁸¹ Moore, p. 483, and also respectively, in the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin Vol. III, pp. 736, 737 and in the Hebrew English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nashim, A. Cohen, tr. (London: Soncino, 1985), n.p.

⁸² Sifre, Piska 32, p. 59; see also The Mishnah., p. 10.

⁸³ Koheleth Rabba on Eccl. 4:13, 14, Midrash Rabba, Vol. 8, pp. 123, 124.

⁸⁴ The Mishnah, p. 453.

continually thinking on the foolishness of wrong doing. Such mental reasoning was encouraged although it was recognized that it was not always sufficient.

The use of an oath. Overcoming the evil inclination is also accomplished by addressing oneself to the *yetzer har'a* with an oath in God's name, as for example, Abraham (Gen. 14:22); Boaz (Ruth 3:13); David (1 Sam 26:10), and so on. Conversely, however, the wicked do likewise when addressing their evil impulse so as to do wrong, as did Gehazi (II Kings 5:20).⁸⁵

The use of Torah. The best possibility to control the evil inclination is to spend considerable time with the Torah of God. Wisdom is comparable to medicine that preserves life: "Life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body (Prov 4:20-22; Erubim 54a).⁸⁶

The deeds of loving kindness. Godly people have found loving deeds a good means by which to control the evil inclination, "Blessed are Israel as long as they are devoted to the study of the Torah, and works of loving kindness, the evil *yetzer* is delivered into their hands" (*Avodah Zarah* 5b).⁸⁷

Prayer as a potent protector. In one instance, a R. Judah the Saint prayed that God would save him from the evil *yetzer* (*Berachoth* 16b).⁸⁸ Other prayers are stated more positively – that God would endow the supplicant with the good *yetzer* (*Berachoth* 17b).⁸⁹ The Rabbis also prayed, "May it be thy will that we shall not sin, and then we shall not be put to shame" (*Berachoth* 17b).⁹⁰ Here the prayer is directed against sin rather than against the evil inclination. Prayer should also be offered that the individual can be led by the good inclination. The heart plays a very important part in doing either the good or evil inclination, especially when the word for heart has two *bets*. The Rabbis prayed, "May our heart become single and a fear of thy name remove us from all thou hatest. Bring us near to all thou lovest, and do with us a righteousness for thy Name's sake."⁹¹ The prayers of the Eighteen Benedictions enable the pious one to pray for God's help to bring him and others back to God, the Torah and his service, as well as the place of repentance.

Did God regret creating the evil yetzer?

On the statement in Scripture, "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" (Gen 6:6), the traditional comment by R. Ivo is interesting: "These words mean: 'Had I had not created him with the *yetzer har'a*, he would not have rebelled against Me'" (*Bereshith Rabbah* 27:4).⁹² The Rabbis recognized the problem God had with man when man continually made the wrong choices, but they also commented, "The moment one accepts a moral standard of behavior, the *yetzer har'a* arrives on the scene as, quite literally, a devil's advocate (*Avodah Zarah* 3a).⁹³ The

⁸⁵ R. Josiah, Sifre, *Piska* 33, pp. 62, 63.

⁸⁶ In the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Seder Moed*, I.W. Slotki, tr. (1938), pp. 375, 376.

⁸⁷ *Babylonian Talmud*, *Seder Moed*, *Seder Nezikin* Vol. IV, A. Mishcom, tr. (1935), p. 22.

⁸⁸ In the Hebrew English Edition of the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Seder Zeraim*, M. Simon, tr. (London: Sincino, 1960), n.p.

⁸⁹ Hebrew English Edition of the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Seder Zeraim*.

⁹⁰ Hebrew English Edition of the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Seder Zeraim*.

⁹¹ S. Schechter, p. 279.

⁹² *Gen. Rabba*, pp. 221, 222.

⁹³ In the *Babylonian Talmud*, *Seder Nezikin*, Vol. IV, pp. 6, 7.

very presence of the *yetzer har'a* reminds a person to make the right choices and through it, become strong to not only resist evil but to also “kill” the evil inclination. He could then vindicate God’s trust in man for being able to make the right choices, especially when he can have his help as well as that of the *yetzer hatov*.

Final destruction of the *yetzer har'a*

Man’s struggle with the *yetzer har'a* will cease one day when the Messiah returns, “When the Holy One, blessed be he, will bring the evil *yetzer* and kill him in the presence both of the righteous and the wicked.” (Sukkah 52a).⁹⁴ In the discussion regarding this passage, the righteous and unrighteous view the evil inclination in an interesting contrast. The righteous see the *yetzer har'a* in the shape of a big mountain and they ask how they were able to overcome such an obstacle. But in the eyes of the wicked, the evil inclination will be as a thin hair and their comment will be that they should have been strong enough to defeat such an insignificant impediment. The removal of the evil inclination will be on a day when Israel will finally be restored to their land and everyone will pursue what is good. The Lord will remove all folly from the hearts of his children and the *yetzer har'a* will disappear from this world. The *yetzer hatov* will counsel people to love the Lord their God with all their hearts, all their souls, that their lives may last forever.⁹⁵

Pertinent questions concerning *yetzer har'a*

The implication is already noted: If sin is regarded only as act, and not a state of being which leads to acts of sin, then does it mean that man can finally achieve victory over his evil inclination, and thereby earn his own atonement from sin? Does this mean that a person can, by subduing his or her *yetzer har'a*, be actually declared righteous by God? To this issue we need ask whether *yetzer har'a* is equivalent to all that is wrong with a person or whether something more serious is involved.

A Biblical Consideration of the Sin Nature

We must consider a most basic and vital component of biblical theology: Who is man prior to his fall, and what happened afterward? Several passages of Scriptures will be noted.

Genesis 3

God had instructed Adam, and Eve was informed later that they were free to eat of the fruit of any tree in the Garden except the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God provided simple, descriptive instruction – namely, that if they were to eat from it, they would then surely die (Gen 2:17).

One aspect of the judgment was physical death, not only for Adam and Eve eventually, but it was a facet passed on to all their descendants. However, is physical

⁹⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Seder Moed, Vol. VI, I.W. Slotki, tr. (1938), pp. 246, 247.

⁹⁵ Schechter, p. 291, citing Pseudo-Jonathan on Deut., 30:4.

death all the information entailed in God's descriptive knowledge? It would appear that more is intended, although Genesis 3 does not fully spell it out.

The clue to the predicament in which Adam and Eve found themselves immediately after the Fall lies in the slaughter of animal(s), first, for properly clothing our first parents. The word used for "cover" (Gen 3:21) is the Hebrew *lavash*, not for the purpose of atonement, but instead, to adorn Adam and Eve. However, the fact that God had to kill animals implies still another dimension of truth and while it is not directly asserted, the possibility for it needs to be entertained.

When Adam and Eve chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they took themselves out of God's will. Their choice had created a barrier between themselves and God. When God came calling for Adam, both he and Eve ran to hide themselves, a facet of behavior they had never before considered.

Since the catastrophe of the Fall of our first parents, Adam's descendants have sought to return to God's will. Subsequently, as other religions developed, in accordance with whatever notion of God man has, they expressed a desire to return to fellowship with God and communicate with him. However, no return is possible based on one's efforts or whatever religion a person possesses. Rather, the return to the circle of God's will appears to be based upon an expiatory sacrifice provided only by God himself. In the Garden of Eden, the animals that were killed were for the purpose of providing an atonement for the sin of our first parents so as to enable them to establish a proper fellowship with God once more: "... and even sacrifice animal life for the preservation of human; so that this act of God laid the foundation for the sacrifices, even if the first clothing did not prefigure our ultimate 'clothing upon'" (2 Cor 5:4).⁹⁶

The necessity of providing for an expiatory sacrifice pointed to a facet of something drastically wrong; more than mere physical death, as serious as that was. But in addition, God also put Adam and Eve out of the Garden so as to not permit them or their descendants to also partake of the "Tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22). Adam and Eve had were cursed with something other than just physical death; they obtained a sin nature and passed that on to their offspring. And, to partake of this tree of life, with both physical and spiritual death as part of their being, the tragedy of the Fall would have been compounded, whereby humankind would live forever with this state of affairs, with no possibility of redemption.

Delitzsch noted, "But after he had fallen through sin into the power of death, the fruit which produced immortality could only do him harm. For immortality in the state of sin is not the eternal life, which God designed for man, but endless misery, which the scriptures called 'the second death' (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8)."⁹⁷

This commentator concluded that the expulsion from paradise was in actuality an action taken for man's own good. At least, with everyone out of the Garden, the possibility existed that people could respond, make a choice to receive the truth as it was shared and then have eternal life. On the other hand, the Jewish understanding of this passage is that "Through man's further disobedience he could secure deathlessness and so God sent man forth from the Garden ... Man, having sunk into sin, must rise again through the spiritual purification of suffering and death."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ C.F. Keil & Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol. I, James Martin, tr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), p. 106.

⁹⁷ Keil & F. Delitzsch, p. 107.

⁹⁸ J.H. Hertz, ed. *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1952), p. 13.

While many may not agree with all that can be derived from Genesis 3 as a result of eating of the tree of good and evil, nevertheless, these are the facets that need to be considered. But in the expansion of God's revelation in His Word, further information is provided to corroborate this aspect of sin as a state that leads to acts of sin.

Leviticus 4

With the enactment of the Mosaic covenant on Mount Sinai, including its specific description of the sin offering in Leviticus 4, one facet of the state of sin, or sin nature, is explained through the offering of the sin offering

God provided through Moses what was special about this offering: "Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins unintentionally (*bishgagah*) and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands'" (Lev 4:2). The key for this sacrifice lies in an understanding of what is unintentional sin, or sin committed through ignorance.

The Scriptures provide numerous examples of sins of commission as well as those of omission. In the former, the sin of commission describes the person who, after knowing that he was not to commit a specific sin, chose to do so anyway. In the sins of omission, when the person knows what is the good thing to pursue, and then deliberately fails to do so, he is also guilty of committing sin. But what exactly is the unintentional sin or sin committed through ignorance?

It would appear a person is up against something within him or herself that is difficult to fathom. The question can then be asked: "How is it possible for one to sin and not even know it?" Assuredly, people do! Such a situation is not even due to the *yetzer har'a* in which one makes the decision in the heart and then proceeds to commit wrong. If the sin is because of ignorance, something more basic is wrong, a factor that lies deep within the person as a part of his or her nature, a dimension that is designated the *state* of sin. So, either the person realizes later that a blunder has been committed, or someone has to remind him or her of the wrongdoing.

The Rabbis were very skittish in speaking of the offer of sacrifices, possibly because of the ideological shift after the fall of the second temple, but nevertheless, the sacrificial system cannot be ignored. Schechter stated "It should be remarked as sacrifices are ... very limited in their efficacy as a means of atonement and reconciliation."⁹⁹ In referring to Leviticus 4, a general rule was laid down, "One brings a sin offering for sins committed in ignorance, but brings no sin offering for sins committed willfully" (*Keriboth*).¹⁰⁰ The major factor in forgiveness and reconciliation depended largely upon repentance for committing the sin, particularly if it was willful, and then offering proper restitution to the party who was wronged, where this was applicable. In particular, however, after the Council of Yavneh, no possibility of offering any sacrifices at the temple was possible; one attained righteousness after realizing he or she had sinned through repentance, prayer of confession, and restitution, and then doing the deeds of righteousness.

Nevertheless, under the Mosaic constitution, when people offered their sacrifices of sin offerings, the possibility of being able to come to faith was present, even knowing that sins can be taken away. When belief was genuine in any believing individual with

⁹⁹ Schechter, p. 295.

¹⁰⁰ In the *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Kodashin*, I. Porusch, tr. (1948), pp. 68, 69.

the presentation of the sin offering, the offerer knew he had been forgiven (Ps 103:12; Micah 7:19).

In the fullness of time, Yeshua died as our sin offering as well, but this is a facet we will consider when discussing Romans 3 and 5.

Psalm 51:5 (M.T., vs. 7)

Without question, this passage is a difficult one to understand but upon closer examination, it does provide an interesting dimension on who a person really is. Tate notes, “This verse has been especially popular with Christian expositors, who have used it in connection with the doctrine of original sin.”¹⁰¹

Tate also mentions alternative explanations concerning this passage, “The sin involved is that of sexual passion or sexual intercourse,” and therefore refers to “The knowledge of good and evil” in Genesis 3. He cites Kaufmann who argued that sexual desire is the archetypal sin in Genesis 3.¹⁰²

Tate calls these interpretations dubious and eventually sums up the argument, “The passage is more commonly understood today as a confession of the essential human condition of the speaker ... No particular sinfulness of the mother or the process of conception is invoked. The emphasis is on the sin of the speaker, who admits that sin has been ‘no freak event’ ... but goes back to the roots of personal existence ... thus the Psalm reflects acceptance of the understanding that human life always involves sin and guilt.”¹⁰³ It would be safe to assume that David, referring to the reason he had committed acts of sin (both adultery and murder) also reflected on the fact that a state of sin existed within him which he inherited from a previous generation through his mother. A person may make a decision to sin in his or her heart, but since David had brought his mother into the picture, he confirmed that sin is not merely the act; it was also a state of being that was directly behind the acts committed. He never cast any aspersion on his mother in any way, but what she had inherited from a previous generation, she also passed on to David. Thus sin is a facet that has been a part of the human race, going back to what had occurred in the Garden of Eden.

Romans 5

The major passage dealing with the aspect of the sin nature in the connection between the first and second Adam is in Romans 5:12-19.

Moo points out that “Death is the inevitable consequence of sin as taught in Genesis 2-3. It was a staple of Jewish theology,” as already noted. But Moo goes to explain with regard to Romans 5,

The death of which Paul speaks here has been variously understood. Some have confined the concept of physical death, noting that thanatos in vs. 14 means physical death. But the passage goes on to contrast thanatos with ... (zoe aionios, ‘eternal life, vs. 21’) ... and ‘for these reasons, it could be argued that thanatos in verse 12 means spiritual death: the estrangement from God that is a result of sin, and which, if not healed through Christ,

¹⁰¹ Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary, Psalms 51-100*, Vol. II, (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), p. 18.

¹⁰² Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel, from its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, M. Greenberg, tr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 293-294.

¹⁰³ Tate, p 19.

*will lead to eternal death.*¹⁰⁴ *Davies' thoughts on this passage in Romans are interesting. For the most part he agrees with the Rabbinical point of view in which nothing causal exists between Adam's sin and the sinfulness of mankind.*¹⁰⁵ *But he reflects second thoughts when commenting on Romans 5:19:*

He goes beyond the teaching of Rabbis, who were careful to insist on the full responsibility of every individual for his sin despite the effects of Adam's fall. It is possible that in the sharp contrast that he has drawn between Messiah, the second Adam, and the first Adam, Paul has been led to a more radical statement of the significance of the latter than is found in the Rabbis.¹⁰⁶

Or, could it be that Paul returned to a more consistent biblical theology that insisted that a lot more is involved in man's nature than mere acts of sin.

The passages in Romans 5:13,14 serve to strengthen the argument so that even Shulam has to admit in an end note on verse 14,

*Traditional Christian doctrine has frequently understood Adam's sin to be generic (or genetic) and to 'infect' all future generations with sinfulness: Human beings sin because they are descendants from Adam, and are genetically 'sinful' in that his sin nature was passed on also to them. This clause is the closest support in the text for this doctrine of 'original sin,' since here Paul directly addresses the issue of those whose sins differ in nature from Adam's. Since the passage remains within this sphere of a digression still, however, its 'doctrinal' status should be very cautiously established.*¹⁰⁷

This statement is interesting because in most cases, Shulam argues from the rabbinic doctrine of *yetzer har'a* and *yetzer hatov*, or from the influence in the Qumran literature with the concept of Two Ways, whereby a person not only has the inclination to commit acts of sin from within, but is also acted upon by two principles outside of him that tempt a person to either sin, or choose what is good and uplifting.

Nevertheless, as Shulam asserts on Romans 3:25, "The blood of the bull and of the scapegoat effected atonement for the high priest and for Israel. Paul therefore describes Yeshua here as both the means (the scapegoat) and the place (the mercy seat) of atonement, since his blood was poured out to atone for those who are faithful to him" (cf. Ps 32:1; 85:2; Heb 9:12; 13:12).¹⁰⁸

But the question can be raised: Is the atonement of Yeshua for acts of sin only, or is it also for the state of sin which leads to the acts committed by a person? Other areas of Romans 3, 5-8, can be used to discuss this issue of the presence of sin as a state of being. But this writer feels that enough has been presented to indicate that there is a good argument for the presence of sin as both an act as will and as a state of being.

¹⁰⁴ Douglas Moo, *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, Romans 1-8*, K. Barker, Gen. Ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), pp. 331, 332.

¹⁰⁵ W.D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1967), pp. 33, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Davies, p. 34

¹⁰⁷ Shulam, footnote 36, p. 206.

¹⁰⁸ Shulam, p. 144.

Conclusion

Does a person have both sin as a state of being and an act, or is all sin to be viewed as acts only. Several observations are offered.

From what has already been noted, sin certainly is an act and can be properly defined by the *yetzer har'a*, with its propensity for evil. Before a child reaches the age of accountability, the acts of wrongdoing can be readily observed. But a person is not totally helpless, and in the formative years as well as with adults, with God's help, one also choose to perform good deeds by following the *yetzer hatov* to live a good life before the Lord and people.

But the question is going to quickly come: Can a person always live on such a higher plane, by choosing to do good deeds and avoiding evil choices and deeds, and thereby earn the righteousness of justification? The rabbis affirm that some do come to the Day of Atonement when the scale of good will far outweigh the scale of evil and if such a person should die in that condition, he or she will be welcomed gladly into God's presence. Rabbinic Judaism recognizes how far a person can fall in making a mess out of his or her life; still, the rabbis hold out hope that one can achieve and every encouragement is provided for a person to do so. But, is atonement based on what a person can do?

People responded in several ways to the sin offering under the Mosaic covenant. Some did not care and went off to the pagan shrines to worship the pagan gods. Eventually, many from both Israel and Judah went into exile for these crimes. Others went through the sacrificial system, but only as a ritual, where they were merely going through the motions of worship. Such a response earned for them God's condemnation (Isa 1:10-15). Still others adopted a legalistic approach to God through the worship system, but this too was a fruitless endeavor. Only those who believed in the atoning sacrifice, either under the Mosaic covenant with its sin offering, or later under the New Covenant with the Messiah offering himself as our atoning sacrifice, were and are able to find an atonement for their sins and be declared righteous by God.

The tragic observation is that no amount of good deeds, while certainly acceptable as far as living within a society is concerned, can earn for us any righteousness from the God who is holy. The plain biblical fact is that a barrier exists between man and God and that blockade is this state of sin; the only way it can be circumvented is through the sin offering, even as it was necessary for Adam and Eve to be brought back again into the fellowship of God's will. All the good deeds performed on the horizontal level before mankind can never be the substitute for what can offered by God in justification on the vertical level.

Rabbinic theology counters by saying that if man has a sin nature, he is then helpless, in the grips of sin as a state, and is not free to choose what is the good thing to do. But, even though humankind is under this state of sin, the fingerprints of God are still upon his or her soul, with the possibility of making the choices to do the right thing and even be Godly outwardly and helpful to everyone around him or her.

So, the tragedy still remains: What makes the human being a sinner? Choosing the wrong acts of sin? As already noted in Leviticus chapter 4, the fact that a person can sin in ignorance only points out the fact that there is something basically wrong and that is the sin nature within every human being. Certainly, Paul did not derive this thinking from any pagan sources which in many cases were quick to point out that man's flesh is

only evil. No, Paul derived his theology from the Tanakh, or the Hebrew scriptures, regarding both the sin nature as well as the presence of acts of sin.

Therefore we conclude that *yetzer har'a* cannot be the sole reason why man is a sinner. Even though a person may live the good life before society and God, the barrier does exist between us and God on the vertical level. Only when a person responds to the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah will he or she know the freedom that comes when the sin nature comes under the control of the Holy Spirit whereby he will also have the power over the acts of sin as well, even as Paul affirmed in Romans 8.

Rome in Jerusalem: The Pope, the Jews and the Gospel in Israel

Gershon Nerel*

“SALVE PONTIFEX - WELCOME,” with this headline, both in Latin and in Hebrew, the Israeli daily *Maariv* congratulated Pope John Paul II on his arrival for a historic visit in the Promised Land.¹⁰⁹ During the six intensive days of the visit, hundreds of thousands of Israelis, especially through the media, were largely exposed to the name of Yeshua (Jesus) and his message. Many spoke about the dawning of a new era in the long history of Jewish-Christian relations. As a matter of fact, weeks and months before the actual visit, numerous TV and radio programs, alongside journalistic publications,¹¹⁰ curiously dealt with various themes relating to Christianity. Thus for a long period of time the pope and Christianity appeared on the Israeli public agenda. The visibility and the general interest that were aroused concerning large and small groups of believers in Yeshua seem to be unprecedented.

Preparations in Israel

Long-time citizens in Jerusalem, well experienced with the non-stop visits of famous dignitaries in their hometown, could hardly remember any other guest in their city welcomed with so many decorations and cleaning. For example, several months before the visit, many roads in the capital city were repaired. The lampblack on special buildings, like the monumental “Terra Santa,” near the official residence of the Prime Minister, was completely removed. Suddenly, this gray looking building now shined with white Jerusalem stones. The ancient Via Dolorosa, in the Old City, was largely refurbished.¹¹¹

Both in western and eastern Jerusalem, the streets were covered with uncounted yellow-white flags of the Vatican. These flags, with the two-keys symbol of the Holy See, were bountifully placed on every corner, long before the guest arrived. Fresh colorful flowers were planted near central highways in the capital. The itinerary of the pope in Jerusalem was published in the newspapers well in advance, and the citizens

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¹⁰⁹ *Maariv*, 21 March 2000, the front page. The pope arrived on Tuesday, the feast of Purim. On this day, the solid daily *Ha'aretz* even issued a special full-size supplement, entitled A Journey Searching for Roots, which included more than 20 articles on the pope, the Vatican and Christianity in general (Hebrew). Another popular daily, *Yediot Aharonot*, announced that day that “The Pope Comes to the state of the Jews” - only in a secondary heading.

¹¹⁰ So far, over 600 items were collected from the Israeli press in Hebrew and in English only.

¹¹¹ Tamar Hausman, “A Renovated Via Dolorosa Debuts Today,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 March 1999.

were kindly requested not to leave their cars alongside the roads.¹¹² *Operation Old Friend* was the police code given for all the security arrangements.

An atmosphere of solemnity and excitement prevailed not only in Jerusalem, but in all places in Israel and the Palestinian Authority where the pope's visit was expected. Nazareth, Tabgha near the Sea of Galilee and Bethlehem were also decorated with flags and posters. Jews and Arabs, Christians and Moslems, welcomed the pope to Israel as a messenger of good will and peacemaker. No doubt, in particular the Jewish world was strongly stimulated to face now the Church and its representatives, as well as the Gospel, from a fresh perspective.

The Grand Jubilee and the Holy Year

The itinerary of the pope to the Holy Land was not merely a personal pilgrimage. It was carried out as a major link within the chain of the "*Jubilaenum AD 2000*" – the Great Jubilee. The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 began on Christmas Eve 1999, with the opening of the "holy door" in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican,¹¹³ with celebrations planned for Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and the opening of the "holy door" in other patriarchal basilicas of Rome. The closing of the Jubilee Year is scheduled for the day of the Epiphany of the Messiah, January 6, 2001.

November 29, 1999, John Paul II promulgated a special document,¹¹⁴ in which he emphasized the distinctive ecumenical character of this Jubilee. The ecumenical character of the Jubilee focused on concrete journeys to the believers of the different churches, and closer encounters with all *Children of Abraham* – Jews and Moslems. The formal logo of the *Jubilaenum*, with five doves in its center, includes the inscription "Christ Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow."

The first Church Jubilee or Holy Year in history was celebrated in 1300, during the pontificate of Boniface VIII. During this year the pope granted a special Indulgence (Remission of Sins) to all those who visited Rome on certain conditions. Originally the Jubilee was to be celebrated every 100 years, yet Clement VI, in 1343, changed the cycle to a period of every 50 years. Eventually in 1470 the period settled on 25 years, the regular interval that has been kept since.¹¹⁵ From the outset, a visit to Rome was a chief condition for receiving *plenary indulgence*.

For the Holy Year AD 2000, the pope introduced a novelty: pious pilgrimages were not limited merely to the four traditional basilicas in Rome, but Jubilee Indulgences could also be gained in the Holy Land. In other words, if visits are made to the basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, or the basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem or the basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth – the pilgrim, after worthily celebrating sacramental confession, can receive the gift of the plenary indulgence.¹¹⁶

¹¹² *Maariv*, Friday 17 March 2000, p. 7.

¹¹³ The "Holy Door" (Porta Sancta) is normally sealed with brickwork, except during the "Holy Year." See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 658 (=ODCC).

¹¹⁴ "'Incarnationis Mysterium,' Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000," See *Bulletin Associated Christian Press*, no. 404 Jerusalem (January-February 1999), p. 2.

¹¹⁵ See ODCC, p. 661. A Holy Year was last celebrated in 1975.

¹¹⁶ "Conditions for Gaining the Jubilee Indulgence," in *Bulletin Associated Christian Press*, no. 404, Jerusalem 1999, p. 3. See also "The Jubilee of the Year 2000 - Tertio Millennio Adveniente," in *Bulletin Dei Verbum*, Catholic Biblical Federation, no. 35, 2/1995, p. 4.

Church Reconciliation with the People of the Covenant

Sunday, March 12, 2000, about a week before his arrival to Jerusalem, the modern sovereign capital of Israel, John Paul II officially asked forgiveness for the many past sins of the Catholic Church, including its treatment of the Jews. In Rome, on the Catholic Church's "Day of Forgiveness" for the 2000 Holy Year, the pope said, "We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours [the Jews] to suffer, and asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant."¹¹⁷

In recent official declarations relating to the Jews, the Holy See increasingly mentions the term "People of the Covenant." By using this term, and sometimes even saying the "Blessed People of the Covenant,"¹¹⁸ the Church de facto approves that the divine covenant with the Jewish people is eternal. While for two millennia the Church had seen itself as the inheritor of the real Judaic tradition (*Verus Israel*), and as the New Israel, now the pontiff repeats a positive theological position: i.e. that the Jews are neither rejected nor forgotten by God. Thus the pope acknowledges the Jewish people in their own homeland, and rectifies the historic Replacement Theology. In other words, the Jews are no longer viewed by the Church as a cursed people, or doomed to be a witness for an exilic and wandering nation.¹¹⁹ This is a fundamental revolution in Catholic thought – reaching its symbolic peak in Jerusalem – following and developing since the *Nostra Aetate* statement, issued by the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

During his visit at the Jerusalem Wailing Wall, John Paul II personally placed a note between the huge stones. This short but significant papal missive, asking for forgiveness from the Jews – now in their own most sacred place – again ended by the appellation "the people of the Covenant."¹²⁰ However, at the same time one may raise the question: which covenant? The answer is found in one of the pope's books, in which he talks about "the people of God of the Old Testament." In his book John Paul II also clarifies his theology:

The Church can forget neither that it received the revelation of the Old Testament through that people with whom God, in his ineffable mercy, made the Ancient Covenant; nor can the Church forget that it draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.¹²¹

As these words speak for themselves, we should also remember another significant nomenclature that the pontiff frequently and openly uses for the Jews; namely "Our

¹¹⁷ Marilyn Henry, Danna Harman and Haim Shapiro, "The Pope Begs Forgiveness for Church's Sins," *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 March 2000, p. 1. As a matter of fact, since his pontificate began in 1978, John Paul II systematically highlighted his policy of reconciliation with all monotheistic religions, and in particular he endeavored to get closer to the Jews, both on personal and on theological levels.

¹¹⁸ Menahem Gantz, "After 2000 Years: Pope Asked Forgiveness," *Maariv*, 13 March 2000, p. 3 (Hebrew).

¹¹⁹ See Yair Sheleg, "Forgiveness for Two Millennia," in *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 3 March 2000, p. B6 (Hebrew).

¹²⁰ Lorenzo Cremonesi, "John Paul II had Messages for Christians as well as Jews," *Ha'aretz*, English Edition, 27 March 2000, p. 3.

¹²¹ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Edited by Vittorio Messori, Knopf (New York: 1995), pp. 95-96.

Senior Brethren.”¹²² Such an appellation, alongside “People of the Covenant,” again and again manifests that the Church now adopts a new terminology towards the Jewish people. Thus a new theological agenda is set for the Church. At the same time, however, while the Church is coming so near to the Jews, it is also examined by the Jews with suspicion and criticism, namely that this approach gets “too close” to them, ultimately serving the eschatological ends of Christianity.¹²³

Openness to the Name and Words of Yeshua

Toward and during the pontifical visit, many Israelis discovered the correct name of Yeshua. Through the local media, this pilgrimage was instrumental in airing to the Israelis the accurate articulation for the Hebrew name of Jesus: *Yeshua*.¹²⁴ It is well known that within mainstream Judaism, instead of *Yeshua*, the distorted term *Yeshu* is almost regularly used. Furthermore, there are many here, even among the younger generation, who still use the abbreviated nomenclature *Yeshu* for purposely blaspheming his name and his memory. In other words, there still exists in Israel a mystical and prejudicial fear to use the truthful name of *Yeshua*.

It is also a fact that only in the Hebrew language the name *Yeshua* has a literal meaning, “God saves” or “salvation.” Unfortunately the enemies of Yeshua still endeavor to hide this meaning. However, even those Jews who claim to be neutral, and thus merely refer to *Yeshu* as a historic name, continue to use this meaningless abridgement *Yeshu*.¹²⁵ Although in all the historic Hebrew and Aramaic versions of the New Testament one reads Yeshua, today besides Jewish believers in Yeshua, only few Israelis are willing to use his name properly. Some would even refuse to mention at all his name, and solely use the designation *Oto Haish* – “That Man.”¹²⁶ At the same time, however, within academic circles, especially among secular Jews, more and more people realize that the appellation *Yeshua* should be used.¹²⁷

Thus, for example, several months before the pontiff's arrival, Yaron London, one of the most appreciated publicists in the country, interviewed on the national TV (Channel 2) a panel of well known historians on the theme of the New Testament and Christianity in Israel.¹²⁸ After a lively discussion, London lifted up in his hand a copy of the New

¹²² Jacob Lefkovitz Dallal, “From Crucifers to Elder Brothers,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 March 2000, p. B4; Amos Nevo, “You, the Jews, You Are Our Elder Brother,” *Yediot Aharonot* (Hamasaf), Friday 17 March 2000, p. 7 (Hebrew).

¹²³ Lorenzo Cremonesi, “The Hug of the Roman Bear,” *Ha'aretz*, Friday 31 March 2000, p. B12 (Hebrew).

¹²⁴ See, for example, Yoseph Elgazi, “All They Want is to Baptize in the Jordan,” *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 18 February 2000, p. B7 (Hebrew).

¹²⁵ Israeli historians like Joseph Klausner and David Flusser hypothetically argue, ex silentio, that during the Second Temple period it was the vernacular Galilean dialect that pronounced *Yeshu* and not *Yeshua*. Cf. Joseph Klausner, *Yeshu Hanotzri* (Jesus of Nazareth), vol. 2 (Ramat-Gan: Massada, 1969), p. 7 note 1 (Hebrew).

¹²⁶ See recently Avigdor Shinan, ed., *Oto Haish*, (Jesus through Jewish Eyes) (Tel-Aviv: 1999), esp. p. 257 (Hebrew).

¹²⁷ Zvi Sadan, “Maran or Maranatha,” in *Kivun*, vol. 18, March-April 2000, pp. 2-3 (Hebrew).

¹²⁸ Broadcasted on 25 December 1999. Among the interviewed were Prof. Doron Mendeles from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr. Aviad Kleinberg from the Tel-Aviv University and Dr. Ray Pritz from the Jerusalem Caspari Center.

Testament, faced his listeners and challenged them to read and search into this Jewish book, and to openly study about Yeshua – as an integral part of the Jewish heritage.

When the pope delivered his central message in a Friday mass at Korazim, near the Sea of Galilee,¹²⁹ the basic teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was fully translated into Hebrew and transmitted on TV and radio. The name of Yeshua was freely mentioned there. As the pope called the 100,000 participants to follow the message of the Beatitudes, also many Israelis were challenged to stop ignoring the words of their Galilean rabbi. Interestingly, in his opening remarks, when welcoming the various local Christian communities, John Paul also mentioned the Hebrew-speaking Catholics of Israel,¹³⁰ and later he also referred to the first disciples, who obviously were Jewish. To many Israelis, as well as to many gentiles, still it comes as a great surprise that the early Christians were Jewish, part and parcel of the Jewish milieu.

The Symbol of the Cross

The many photographs and films that spotlighted the pope's visit also gave ample space showing the sign of the cross. This was so, for example, when demonstrating the episcopal cross hanging on the pontiff's neck, as well as with the presence of many crosses on Christian buildings and sites. Also those pilgrims that accompanied John Paul II, noticeably manifested numerous crosses and symbols of the crucifix.¹³¹

The most salient symbol of the cross, with a tangible figure of the humiliated and crucified Messiah, was exhibited on the top of the pope's formal pastoral staff. This appeared everywhere. Nobody could ignore it, yet nobody really protested against showing the cross with a crucifix.

In Israel, where some people still turn their faces and look the other direction when they approach anything with a cross, this was something special. In a country where there are debates whether pupils and soldiers should even enter a church building or visit a monastery, this was very special. For a country where small children in the elementary schools are still taught in their math classes to omit the pedestal from the standard plus sign (+), because otherwise it resembles the Christian cross, the normal manifestation of the papal and other crosses was something very remarkable. It was in particular unique when John Paul completed his visit at the Jerusalem Wailing Wall. Before leaving the area, he faced the stones and slightly marked with his trembling right hand, as he usually does, the sign of the cross. This was quite naturally accepted, and none accused him of sacrilege at a Jewish shrine.

To this Holy Land, where the Crusaders of the Middle Ages, under the auspices of the papacy, de facto identified the sign of the cross with that of the sword, and the cross actually represented might and cruelty, now came this pontiff with a spirit of humility and appeasement. Unlike the medieval times and the deeds of the Inquisition, now the sign of the cross no longer symbolizes a threat or death to the Jewish people. The Jews, living now in their homeland and sovereign State, feel secure and confident also to face the symbol of the cross. Thus, for example, many signs of the cross now openly appear

¹²⁹ See also "Korazim - Mount of the Beatitudes," (Peter Returns to the Land of Jesus), Information Sheet of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, 24 March 2000.

¹³⁰ Haim Shapiro, "At Korazim, Pope Preaches Humility," *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 March 2000.

¹³¹ Lili Galili, "Between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the Message of John Paul II will not Remain Solely Religious," in *Ha'aretz*, Tuesday, 21 March 2000, p. A2 (Hebrew). Cf. "The Papal Pilgrimage," *Time Magazine*, 3 April 2000, p. 35.

on large ads within local newspapers, announcing a new exhibition on the theme of "Israel the Cradle of Christianity" at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (from March 27 to October 21, 2000).¹³²

Scholarly Study of Christianity

Precisely two weeks before the pope's visit, on Tuesday, March 7, 2000, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem solemnly inaugurated a new department, the "Center for the Study of Christianity." The enthusiastic initiator behind this move was the Center's current Director, Gedalyahu Guy Stroumsa. The guest lecturer at the dedication ceremony was Johannes Beutler, a Jesuit scholar from the *Pontificia Universita Gregoriana* in Rome.¹³³ In a new brochure released for this occasion, the heads of this Center admit that until now "at the Hebrew University Christianity has been studied and researched less intensively than Judaism and Islam."¹³⁴

Therefore, with the foundation of this new Center a great progression is made to practically improve and enlarge the study of Christianity in Israel. Members of the faculty at the university already maintain close scholarly relationships with prominent Catholic institutions within Jerusalem, like the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise, the Franciscan Studium Biblicum, the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research and the Ratisbonne Pontifical Institute of Jewish Studies.¹³⁵

One cannot overestimate the significance of the establishment of this Center, so closely linked to the pontiff's visit. Indeed, as Stroumsa said in his opening remarks, "Within this Center one finds a unique combination between leading researchers and the location of the Hebrew University in the city of Jerusalem, where Christianity was born." The scholarly links of this university, being the flagship of Jewish studies, with a number of excellent private and ecclesiastical Catholic institutions in Jerusalem, actually reflect a reality of mutual interest, while both sides benefit from this dialogue.

There is no doubt that the establishment of this new "Center for the Study of Christianity" in Jerusalem acknowledges the lacuna that had existed for too long a period within Israeli academic circles. The ongoing scholarly contacts between Israeli University experts and the Vatican Archives, as well as the famous pontifical Museum, have now reached a formalized status. This was seen, for example, when prior to his visit in Israel, the pope officially invited to the Vatican two leading researchers from the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology. During this visit Yizhar Hirschfeld presented to the pope a unique gift – replicas of two ancient coins, bearing the name of Jesus, discovered in excavations near Tiberias during this year.¹³⁶

Interestingly, this Center, with such relations and with further planned projects, was founded only this year as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem celebrates its 75th anniversary. Namely, it took almost a century until the first Hebrew National University

¹³² *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, 24 March 2000, p. 32.

¹³³ As indicated on the formal invitation to the ceremony, issued by the President of the University, the topic of the lecture was "The Meaning of the 'Jews' for the Readers of John."

¹³⁴ The new brochure of the Center, column 1.

¹³⁵ The new brochure of the Center, column 2.

¹³⁶ Some of these coins, belonging to the Moslem period in the land, more than a thousand years ago, also bear the inscription "Jesus - King Messiah." It is planned that two of the original coins will be loaned to the Vatican Museum for a temporary exhibition. See "Pope Meets with University Researchers," in *Akademia* (supplement of *Ha'aretz*), vol. 9, March 2000, p. 26.

in the land of Israel could benefit from a stabilized self-confidence and deal openly with Christianity, Jewry's daughter religion.

This feeling of security was manifested during the dedication ceremony, clearly expressed through the congratulations of the President and the Rector of the University. From their words it was obvious that only now, the university – largely representing the entire nation's identity – at last feels safe in the Jewish homeland. The present Israeli younger generation knows that the national Jewish survival is secure, and that they no longer need to feel threatened by Christianity. Thus, while currently Israelis are politically negotiating with former enemy Yasser Arafat within a peace process, at the same time they naturally also approach Christians as equals. Here and now the long historic feelings of superiority/inferiority seem to be taken away from the delicate Judeo-Christian relationships.¹³⁷

Thus, within contemporary Israeli perspective, and especially at the scholarly level, there is a growing sense that the traditional concept of a "Jewish problem" is no longer relevant. In other words, these two events, the institutionalization of a "Center for the Study of Christianity," which is the first of its kind in Israel,¹³⁸ and the positive pontifical visit, indicate the end of the "War of Two Millennia."¹³⁹

"Jesus the Palestinian?"

John Paul II, like many other pilgrims from Catholic and Protestant churches, came to the Promised Land to acknowledge the biblical and Jewish roots of Christianity. Marcel Dubois, a professor and Dominican priest living in Jerusalem,¹⁴⁰ expressed this as follows:

The pope is returning to the authentic source of Christianity, and also to the spirit of the New Testament, by accepting that the Old Testament prepared the world for the New Testament. The attitude toward Yeshua the Messiah [Jesus Christ] in the Catholic Church has changed. We received our faith from Israel because we read the messages of the Jewish prophets in church.¹⁴¹

In other words, the pope now again admits that the New Testament, written by Jews and originating from the Old Testament, is de facto a Jewish groundwork. Therefore, as it was so clearly manifested throughout the pontiff's visit in the land of the Bible, the top Catholic leadership is even happy to "share" Yeshua's Jewishness.

Yet, while within many churches today, especially in the West, there is a growing tendency to stop overlooking the Jewishness of Yeshua, an influential group of Arab Palestinian Christians raise opposite populist banners, namely those of "Jesus the

¹³⁷ See Tom Segev, "Who is Jesus (What Israeli Pupils Learn About Christianity)," in *Ha'aretz*, Friday, 24 March 2000, p. B12 (Hebrew).

¹³⁸ See also "First Center for the Study of Christianity Inaugurated at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem," in *Index Yerushalayim*, 16 March 2000 (Hebrew); *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 March 2000 (with photograph).

¹³⁹ Cf. Assa Kasher, "The End of the War of 2000 Years," in *Maariv* (Musaf), Friday, 24 March 2000, p. 4 (Hebrew).

¹⁴⁰ Marcel Dubois is professor of philosophy and religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 1996 he was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize.

¹⁴¹ Marcel Dubois, "An Interview," in *Israel Today*, (News About Israel), vol. 16, April 2000, p. 6.

Palestinian” and “Mary the Palestinian.” As Israeli Jews are just beginning to make their peace with the historic Jewish Yeshua, the Palestinian Authority, and no less the Palestinian Latin Patriarch, Michel Sabah, are propagating the mythical figure of “Jesus the first Palestinian.” This mainly comes as a political argument, in order to sustain the Palestinian ties to the land, and particularly to strengthen their claims to Jerusalem.¹⁴²

Ironically, some Israelis, such as the well-known author Amos Oz, when observing the Palestinian national identification with the Messiah born in Bethlehem, now openly express their frustration that for the Israelis, Yeshua still remains a too remote curiosity, if not an outright taboo. Oz even claims that through the “political Palestinization of Jesus,” not only the Palestinians but actually all Arabs want to recruit the full support of the pope and the Church for their cause. Moreover, Oz also explains that such Palestinian propaganda portrays the modern Jew again as the common enemy of both Christianity and Islam. In other words, Oz sees in such a development another ugly phase of modern anti-Semitism.¹⁴³

As a matter of fact, it was already many years before the visit of John Paul II in Israel, that some Palestinian Christians endeavored, even with a certain success, to create a “Palestinian Jesus.” Regardless of historical truth, such Christians, with the Anglican Canon Naim Ateek as one of their major spokesmen,¹⁴⁴ seek to support Palestinian nationalism through a distorted Liberation Theology. Over and over again they give the inaccurate impression that first-century “Palestinians” are identical with contemporary Palestinians. Such misleading ideas are phrased, for instance, as follows:

*Jesus Christ's resurrection took place in Jerusalem. Therefore, the first witnesses to the resurrection were Palestinians. The Church was born in Palestine as the early disciples and followers of Jesus were Palestinians. The Palestinian Christians of today are the descendants of those early Christians ... Palestinian Christians of today are the present generation of that great cloud of witnesses to Jesus who came before them, and who will, God willing, come after them until Christ comes again. They and their ancestors have maintained a living witness to Jesus and his resurrection from the beginning of the Church, and they should see themselves dynamically continuing such a witness in the land ...*¹⁴⁵

Yet against any such semantic gymnastics, which seem to appear simple or easy in English, others simply point to the original meaning of “Palestinian” geographical nomenclature, which definitely sounds differently in Hebrew. Namely, in Hebrew, *Eretz-Israel*, the land of Israel, by all means does not bear the same connotation as Palestine, much less Arab or Moslem Palestine. Thus, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew we read twice about “the land of Israel” - as Joseph was told in a dream in Egypt to take Yeshua and return to the land of Israel (2:19-21).

¹⁴² Michael S. Arnold, “Palestinians for Jesus?”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 March 2000, pp. B3-B4; Yossi Klein Halevi, “Pilgrimage into the Lion's Den,” in *The Jerusalem Report*, 27 March 2000, p. 20.

¹⁴³ Amos Oz, “The Vicar of Jesus Comes to Jerusalem,” in *Yediot Aharonot*, (Hamusaf Leshabat), Friday, 17 March 2000, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴⁴ In 1976, Canon Ateek was the first native-born leader to serve as Chairman of the United Christian Council in Israel (UCCI). See Christian Comment/Oikoumenikos, “Evangelicals in Israel,” in *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 November 1976.

¹⁴⁵ Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996, Sixth Printing [1989]), p. 113.

Which Authentic Church?

The synchronized Palestinian de-Judaization of Yeshua, particularly highlighted during the pope's visit in Bethlehem, has also another dimension. As the Palestinian Christians argue that "Palestine is the Fifth Gospel,"¹⁴⁶ and that "an Arab Christian community has existed in this land since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2),"¹⁴⁷ they de facto assume the position of the first indigenous church in the Holy Land.¹⁴⁸ Such notions were also expressed by Riah Abu El-Assal,¹⁴⁹ the present Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem, and by Elias Chacour,¹⁵⁰ a Galilean Greek Catholic (Melkite) priest. Furthermore, not all the Palestinian Christians consider themselves a minority in the Land; they see themselves as an integral part of the entire Arab population, which is mostly of the faith of Islam.¹⁵¹ This, as a matter of fact, also coincides with some odd Palestinian efforts to discover their national roots in the land among the ancient Canaanites.

Here we observe a newly shaped oriental Replacement Theology. It is especially the Palestinian intelligentsia in this land that crystallizes the emotional impression that Palestinians are the modern sons and daughters of the first Jerusalem Church, allegedly representing and following the model of the "authentic church." Thus the Palestinian Christians attempt to establish a dual ownership of the mother church of the Holy Land, alongside contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua.

Yet it is no secret that Messianic Jews almost unilaterally refer to themselves as *the* genuine followers of the first-century Nazarenes.¹⁵² For Messianic Jews, misnomers like "Jesus the Palestinian" and the "Palestinian Church of Pentecost" are far from even being anachronisms,¹⁵³ they are a total historic mistake.¹⁵⁴

Messianic Jews value the rebirth of the State of Israel, recently also recognized officially by John Paul II, as well as the restoration of their own modern movement, as a prophetic development. Therefore Messianic Jews interpret both these events in connection with Ezekiel's vision (chapter 37) regarding the physical resurgence of Israel, the "dry bones" in the valley – ultimately leading to its spiritual rebirth. Contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua see themselves as the remnant that follows

¹⁴⁶ Naim S. Ateek, p. 114.

¹⁴⁷ Bishara Awad, "West Bank Squeezed by Warring Majorities," in *Christianity Today*, 16 November 1998, p. 68.

¹⁴⁸ See Mitri Raheb, *I Am A Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), esp. pp. vii-viii, 3-14.

¹⁴⁹ Riah Abu El-Assal, "The Identity of the Palestinian Christian in Israel," in Naim S. Ateek, Marc H. Ellis and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices* (New York Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1992), pp. 77-80.

¹⁵⁰ Elias Chacour, "A Palestinian Christian Challenge to the West," in *Faith and Intifada*, pp. 85-88.

¹⁵¹ Michael Prior, "From the Chair," in *Living Stones*, vol. 12, Summer 1995, p.1.

¹⁵² See Menachem Benhayim, "Book Review: Nazarene Jewish Christianity," in *Messianic Jewish Life*, vol. 73, April 2000, p. 31; cf. also Shoshanah Feher, *Passing Over Easter: Constructing the Boundaries of Messianic Judaism*, Walnut Creek 1998, pp. 112-113.

¹⁵³ See also Clarence H. Wagner, Jr., "The Palestinisation of Jesus," in *The Messianic Jew and Hebrew Christian*, vol. 65, June 1992, pp. 36-39.

¹⁵⁴ Menachem Benhayim, "Palestinian Liberation Theology," in *The Hebrew Christian*, vol. 63, # 3, September 1990, pp. 85-88; also idem "A Response to Naim Ateek," in *Mishkan*, issue 28/1998, pp. 90-93; cf. K.W., "Jew and Arab or Israeli and Palestinian?," in *Kivun*, vol. 18, March 2000, p. 12.

the footsteps of Jewish Yeshua, as well as following the footprints of their first-century national and spiritual forefathers.¹⁵⁵

Within this context, we might also mention that the pope also displayed special sensitivity to the Jews when he occasionally called this place *terra promessa*, the “Promised Land,” rather than the “Holy Land.” Only to the Jews is this area the “Promised Land.”¹⁵⁶ In the meantime, however, it seems that within the variety of ideological sectors in the land of Israel, both Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians will continue to exploit any theological or national vacuum for shaping their respective identities.¹⁵⁷

Reminiscences About a “Personal Pope”

In the Hebrew media, John Paul II was presented not only as the friend of the Jewish people in general, but also as a personal friend of Jewish persons from his childhood in Poland, prior to the Second World War. The pope was highly commended for remembering the Jewish survivors of his Polish hometown Wadowice, as well as keeping ongoing contacts with them. One of these Jews, Jersi (Yorek) Kluger was interviewed in a local newspaper as the intimate friend of “Pope Lolek,” still freely mentioning this affectionate appellation of their youth.¹⁵⁸

Toward his visit at Yad Vashem John Paul officially asked to arrange for him a meeting with all the survivors of his hometown. This of course was granted at Yad Vashem.¹⁵⁹ At the end of the ceremony, where the pope declared that the lesson of the Holocaust is to ensure that never again will evil prevail, and denounced antisemitism, he had an emotional reunion with about 30 Holocaust survivors from his hometown Wadowice. Most of them now live in Israel.¹⁶⁰

The media repeatedly quoted a unique testimony of Edith Tzirer, another Holocaust survivor from one of the labor camps. Crying with tears she was seen on the TV screens, telling her personal story, how after the war she, a 14-year-old starving girl, was helped by a young Catholic priest who gave her a large piece of bread and a cup of tea. This young girl, who was suffering from tuberculosis and was found lying next to a camp fence the day of liberation in January 1945, was carried three kilometers on the back of this priest to the Warsaw Train Station, to join other survivors. This young priest was Karol Wojtyla, now pope John Paul II.¹⁶¹ Simultaneously, this story of Edith, weeping and greeting the pope, was also broadcast on the radio for several programs.

¹⁵⁵ See Gershon Nerel, “Primitive Jewish Christians in the Modern Thought of Messianic Jews,” in Simon Claude Mimouni, ed., *Le Jud'o-Christianisme*, Les Editions du Cerf, Patrimoines, Paris 2000 (Forthcoming).

¹⁵⁶ Uri Dan, “The Pope’s Promise,” in *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 March 2000.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Zvi Sadan, “Will the Two Go Together?: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Body of Messiah,” in *Kivun*, vol. 17, January 2000, pp. 8-9 (Hebrew).

¹⁵⁸ Menachem Gantz, “Yorek and Lolek: My Friend the Pope,” in *Maariv* (Sofshavua), 17 March 2000, pp. 40-42 (Hebrew).

¹⁵⁹ Ora Arif and Yossi Bar, “Childhood Friends Prepare to Encounter with ‘Pope Lolek,’” in *Yediot Aharonot*, 12 March 2000, (Hebrew).

¹⁶⁰ “Pope Honors Holocaust Victims,” in *Ha'aretz* English Edition, 24 March 2000.

¹⁶¹ Elli Wohlgeleenter, “Hometown Survivors Greet John Paul II,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 24 March 2000, p. A4

The impact of this and other personal testimonies on the Israelis was tremendous. The simple human stories brought a sense of healing. Spontaneously people felt that now hatred and enmity are no more a part of the scene. Thus, for instance, Rosita Bergson (Epstein), an 85-year old Jewish lady who was born in Warsaw, Poland, and now lives with her daughter at the Messianic Moshav Yad-Hashmona, shared her deep feelings with her family about the pope's visit. With tears in her eyes Rosita (Rachel) told them: "Now I am released not only about my feelings towards the Germans, but also towards the Polish people; overnight the pope took away this long lasting hatred between Jews and Christians."¹⁶²

There was also another interesting human aspect related to the visit. The Jewish hosts greatly appreciated the body language of this elderly man – although everyone was aware of the fact that this was a sick man, suffering from Parkinson's disease. Still, his gentle behavior, his humbleness and seriousness were often noticed. It was the practical wisdom of the elderly pope, and especially when he very carefully chose his words and statements, that left a most positive impression on the Israelis.

Much respect was given to the pope's eloquence, while this was sharply contrasted with the loose tongue of Rabbi Joseph Ovadia, the former Sefardi Chief-rabbi of Israel, who is now the leader of the Shas religious/political party. During the feast of Purim, Rabbi Ovadia verbally attacked Yossi Sarid, the Israeli Minister of Education; Ovadia mindlessly used labels like *Haman* and *Amalek* against the Minister.¹⁶³ So the media, as well as the average person, dedicated much time comparing the speeches of two elderly religious leaders: the careless rhetoric of the former chief rabbi, as compared to the honorable eloquence of the pope.¹⁶⁴

Epilogue

For many in Israel, the visit of the pope appeared to be the anticlimax of the Millennium Fever, or the Y2K Millennium Syndrome, closely observed during the last months of the last century. In the month of March, 2000, Israelis still remembered the fears concerning the "invasion of Christian lunatics," expected to participate in the apocalyptic events on the threshold of the new millennium. But now the pope, accompanied by some 50,000 young Catholic pilgrims, represented to the Israelis a different kind of Christianity. Most locals were impressed by the quiet, solid and well-organized groups of Catholic pilgrims. In general, the stability of the papacy as an institution, and the uniformity of the Catholic world, as reflected during this very carefully calculated pilgrimage, manifested a sharp contrast to the suspected "suicidal Christians,"¹⁶⁵ deported from the

¹⁶² A personal testimony told by Salo and Olga Kapusta, Yad Hashmona, 4 May 2000.

¹⁶³ Yoel Markus, "The Sentence of Amalek as the Sentence of a Persecutor," in *Ha'aretz*, 21 March 2000, p. B1 (Hebrew); "The Blaspheming Rabbi," *ibid*; Cf. Seffi Rachlevsky, "The Future of Amalek," in *Maariv* (Musaf Leshabat), 24 March 2000, p. 9 (Hebrew). Rachlevsky is the author of the challenging book *Messiah's Donkey* (Hebrew), where he analyzes Orthodox Jewish Messianism and exposes its attitudes towards secular Jews.

¹⁶⁴ Ron Maiberg, "The Banging of a Crack of Opportunities," in *Maariv*, Tuesday 28 March 2000, p. 8 (Hebrew); cf. Giyora Eilon, "My Little Clown, Will You Hang Me," in *Iton Yerushalayim*, Friday 24 March 2000, pp. 20-26 (Hebrew).

¹⁶⁵ Ilana Shoval-Shaked, "Apocalypse Now," in *Yediot Aharonot, Hamusaf Lehag*, 19 September 1999, pp. 14-17 (Hebrew).

country by the police at the end of 1999.¹⁶⁶ Namely, this six-day visit greatly contributed to modify the stereotypic understanding among some Israelis, still thinking that almost every Christian Millennialist should be suspected of provocative activities in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁷

Eventually, the gestures and the declarations of the pope concerning the peoples of the Middle East, and the future of the Holy Land, seemed to please every side. Bilaterally, the hosts on both the Israeli and the Palestinian camps were satisfied that the pope expressed his solidarity with their needs and problems. The pontiff's remarkable visit left both Jews and Arabs with the sense that something had changed.¹⁶⁸ However, it is especially among the Israelis that one gets the impression that the pope was not merely accepted with respect, but that many simply "fell in love" with John Paul II. Now we hear more people who say that the pope is even a "haver hadash" – our new friend.¹⁶⁹

At last, however, it should also be noted that during his well-planned visit in Israel, the pope, as well as his prelates, "forgot" to face another challenging Jewish aspect: the Church and the contemporary Jewish believers in Yeshua. He should offer not mere papal lip service towards few Hebrew-speaking Catholics, but rather the Church's comprehensive evaluation of the movement that today wants to revive the authentic Jewish branch within the universal body of believers in Yeshua.

This was the *real non-event* of John Paul's significant pilgrimage – the challenge of the modern *Church of the Circumcision* to the *Church of the Gentiles*. No doubt the independent present movement of Jewish-believers in Yeshua represents a unique challenge to all churches. Anyway, probably sooner than later even Catholic Rome will need to review its official position regarding the stimulus of this dynamic group.

¹⁶⁶ See Boaz Gaon, "Waiting for the Messiah - The Horror of the Millennium: Believers Prepare to Hasten the Return of Jesus," in *Maariv*, (Sofshavua), 15 January 1999, pp. 14-18 (Hebrew); Tamar Gutman, "Increase of 50% Among Tourists Suffering of 'Jerusalem Syndrome' and Who Need Psychiatric Treatment," *Iton Yerushalayim*, 3 September 1999, p. 40 (Hebrew).

¹⁶⁷ Amir Ben-David, "13 Arrested Members of Christian Sects Deported Yesterday Night," in *Maariv*, Friday, 29 October 1999, p. 6 (Hebrew); Hilit Merhav and Dan Even, "I am the Messiah," in *Kol Hazman*, 12 November 1999, pp. 50-53 (Hebrew). Cf. David Rosen, "Treat the Pilgrims with Christian Charity," in *Ha'aretz*, English Edition, Monday 15 February, 1999, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ Abraham Rabinovich, "Pope's Pilgrimage Ripples with Meaning," *The Jerusalem Post*, Friday 31 March 2000, p. B4.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas O'Dwyer, "Shalom, Haver Hadash," in *Ha'aretz*, English Edition, 27 March 2000, p. 3.

New York 99: Jewish Evangelism on the Eve of the Third Millennium

Introduction

The sixth international conference of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) met August 12-17 as 130 participants from 16 countries convened in New York. The LCJE is a network of organizations and individuals who seek to facilitate and strengthen the gospel proclamation to Jewish people throughout the world. The representatives serve as a catalyst to increase cooperative ventures and to coordinate efforts between mission agencies, Messianic congregations, denominations and theological institutions.

Recent Developments within the Last Decades of this Millennium

In the last 30 years there has been a significant increase in the number of Jewish people believing in Yeshua haMashiach (Jesus the Messiah) throughout the world, as well as an increasing number of Messianic congregations. The modern movement of Jewish believers in Yeshua cannot be ignored; it has come to stay and will not go away.

In the former Soviet Union we see a steady increase in numbers of maturing disciples eager and enthusiastic to share their faith. As demographics shift, many are moving to other parts of the world, becoming a strong testimony for the gospel.

In Germany a number of our brothers and sisters in the Lord are reaching out in love to Jewish people. We are thankful to God for Messianic congregations and house groups that are springing up there.

In Israel concern for ministry to the Messianic youth is increasing as Messianic Jews consider the importance of the next generation of Israeli believers. Efforts at reconciliation between Israeli and Palestinian believers stand as a testimony to the power of the gospel, giving us glimpses of the peace that only Yeshua can bring.

Secular media is proving to be an effective tool in reaching people with the good news of Yeshua. In addition the Internet has provided open access for Jewish people to explore the claims of Yeshua as well as countless opportunities for believers to share the gospel through chat rooms and web sites.

We rejoice in the reports of all these developments!

Jewish Identity

As we enter a new millennium we recognize that Jewish people express their identity in many ways and are affected by social, political and religious changes in the wider society. We also recognize that Jewish identity and therefore Jewish survival is once again being challenged.

Those of us who are Jewish share in the challenges confronting our people and stand with them in the need to strengthen and preserve our God-given identity. We also recognize that our faith in Yeshua is seen by many as a threat to Jewish identity and survival. Yet we believe that the core of Jewish identity is tied to a purpose and a divine calling that is fulfilled only in Yeshua—to be reconciled to God and to be a light to the nations for his glory. We therefore reject the commonly held view that Jews who believe in Jesus are no longer Jewish.

Those of us who are gentiles affirm that Jews who believe in Yeshua do not forfeit their Jewish identity; indeed, our own identity as Christians is also found in Yeshua the Jewish Messiah. Through him our identity is linked to the destiny of the people Israel. We do not wish to see our brothers and sisters lose their Jewish identity. We are enriched and encouraged by their distinct identity within the body of the Messiah.

As Jews and gentiles united by faith in Yeshua, we recognize the right of Jewish believers in Yeshua to maintain a recognizable Jewish identity and to communicate faith in the Messiah to Jews and Gentiles alike.

To the Church at Large

We are deeply grieved that, in recent decades, some churches and denominations have stated that Jewish people do not need to hear the gospel. At the same time we are encouraged that the witness of faithful gentile believers in Yeshua has helped many Jewish people come to faith.

We rejoice in the renewed emphasis some churches and denominations have placed on Jewish evangelism and we urge all churches to recognize their responsibility to witness to Jewish people. We call on churches to respect and affirm the Jewish identity of Messianic believers, whether they worship in traditional churches or Messianic congregations.

In light of recent heinous crimes—such as a man shooting Jewish children in a day school for the purpose of publicizing and promoting violence against the Jews—we implore you to stand with us against anti-Semitism of any kind wherever it is found.

The Millennium Ahead

Without Yeshua haMashiach there would be no millennium to mark. The millennium not only refers back to his birth, but also points to the future—the same Yeshua who proclaimed himself the Messiah of Israel also promised to return. He was, is and will be the only way of salvation for Jews and gentiles. He is the Lord; the future is his. Therefore we who have found reconciliation with God through Yeshua carry into the next millennium the privilege and obligation to proclaim his reconciling power to others.

Our Hope

As the world prepares to celebrate the year 2000, our hope is that individuals, churches, congregations, denominations and theological institutions will commit themselves to the task of evangelism as we:

- 1) tell Jews as well as gentiles of the reconciling power found only in the Lord Yeshua
- 2) take advantage of the window of witnessing opportunity as ideologies and trends that failed to keep their promises leave people hungry for truth and open to Yeshua
- 3) devote resources to bringing the gospel to Jewish people in underevangelized areas of the world
- 4) pray fervently for the salvation of Jewish people, for the peace of Jerusalem and for the peoples of the Middle East
- 5) joyfully anticipate and work towards the day when all Israel will be saved
- 6) eagerly await the return of our Messiah.

Book Reviews

Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus. General and Historical Objections. Michael L. Brown. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000. Pp 270.

Reviewed by Arthur Glasser

In the first of a series of three volumes, we encounter a Jewish scholar who speaks out of his rich experience in seeking to establish from a Jewish frame of reference the validity of biblical faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This volume deals with 19 general and 16 historical objections to Jesus raised by the Jewish people. His second volume will discuss theological objections and those based on Messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. The final volume will deal with Jewish objections to the New Testament and to criticisms of Jesus found in the Talmud and the Mishna. All told, around 150 separate objections will be addressed. Justification for this approach is found in the record of Paul's ministry in the synagogue in Thessalonica: "For three weeks he argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying: 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you is the Messiah.'" (Acts 17:2,3)

To whet your appetites this first volume begins with the familiar range of emotional objections based on misinformation. They provide us with gracious ways to break through to where friendly interaction becomes possible and the significance of God's grace and judgment can be positively stressed. These pave the way for grappling at length with such issues as Jesus and world peace, the Church and anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Brown is at his best when he climaxes this appalling catastrophe with an explanation that has virtually eluded the best insights of world Jewry. More than 40 pages of closely documented notes stimulate us to explore his answers in more detail.

Three separate objections constitute Brown's overall purpose in producing this series. First, he intends to provide insight into the objections Jewish people might raise during the course of sharing with them the good news of Jesus the Messiah. Second, he aims to help Messianic Jews who have become confused and befuddled by anti-missionaries. And finally, he wants to help Jews of every background – Reform or Hasidic, humanist or Conservative, Orthodox or Reconstructionist, secular or New Age – who do not yet believe that Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah. Moishe Rosen of Jews for Jesus enthusiastically endorses this first volume as "incisive and to the point." Indeed, he predicts that Brown "will surely be acclaimed as the new expert in Jewish Christian apologetics."

As we carefully study this book we will increasingly thank God that he has called Brown to this specialized ministry on our behalf. Indeed, his utterly reasonable and valid biblical analyses of objections to Jesus will help us again and again in our witness to the Jewish people. But we must not be content merely with giving solid answers to objections, for this can too easily lead us nowhere. In this first volume Brown frequently gives us natural ways for using a good refutation as a means whereby a gospel witness might be moved forward. This helps us keep in mind that every

expression of objection to Jesus can be turned into an opportunity to turn the conversation more directly to the issue of Jesus as Messiah, Savior and friend. After all, according to Acts 26:18 our task is to “open their eyes” with a friendly personal exchange that contains the intimation that the reality of God includes far more than people imagine.

How should one use this book? I found that to race through it from cover to cover was pointless. As a non-Jew I found that I was caught up in a world of Jewish thought and expression that was not congenial to my natural desire to be an authentic witness to Jesus. I could not directly use his material. Only a Jewish person can utilize Brown’s insight directly. I soon recognized that as a non-Jew I would have to reconceptualize them and make everything my own. Memorizing would never do! This meant that I should study each specific objection and response, perhaps as a part of my quiet time. And I should make this a spiritual exercise by asking the Lord to give insight into the manner in which I might turn the objection into an opportunity for gospel usefulness. True, some objections can be dealt with briefly, but not all!

In the end we will have well-worn copies of this first volume, and about the time we have been fully challenged and stimulated by Brown’s insight, the second volume will be available. Many Messianic Jews and non-Jewish believers in Jesus have been waiting for these books for some time. Now is the time for us to make the most of them.

Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions. Gerald H. Anderson (ed). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp xxvi + 845.

Reviewed by Bodil F. Skjøtt

Inspiring is perhaps not a word most often used to describe a dictionary, but when it comes to this pioneering dictionary of the many men and women who have shaped Christian missions over the centuries the word seems appropriate. The book with its almost 2400 biographical articles is not only the work of the editor, Gerald H. Anderson, and his assistant editor, Robert T. Coote. It has also taken an editorial advisory board of 11 persons from the field of missiology, the advice of about 50 other colleagues from around the world and 349 authors in 45 different countries to put together this work which uniquely tells the story of the people “who have worked, witnessed, prayed and given to advance the world wide mission of Jesus Christ - ‘so that the world may believe.’”

The articles are listed in alphabetical order but the elaborate appendix and index make it easy to explore regions or periods of work as well as types of work. It goes without saying that the majority of the persons included are from the 19th and 20th centuries. This is the great period of Protestant missions and the period from which records exist to document the history. But the articles do cover the whole post-New Testament period down to the present and represent Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, Pentecostal, and independent as well as indigenous churches’ mission efforts. By default history will almost always be the history of the strong and mighty. They are the people whose names and deeds made it into the records, and when the history is written it is their history the archives express. In this case it has meant that non-Western workers are less represented here than their actual contribution would

require. The same is true of women whose names and contributions until the previous century often are invisible in the documented records and their story therefore difficult to tell.

Many of the pioneers in Jewish missions have found their way into the dictionary as have famous Hebrew Christians. Among those included are Joseph Samuel Frey, Joseph Rabinowitz, and Joseph Wolff; some of the great pioneers in Jerusalem such as Hans Nicolaysen and Michael Solomon Alexander can also be found as can scholars such as Carl Paul Caspari, Franz Julius Delitzsch, Gustav Hermann Dalman and Jakob Jocz, who have all made an important contribution to the work of Jewish mission.

For those of us who are mainly involved in Jewish mission and are inclined to underline God's (and our) mission to the Jew first it is sobering and humbling to see the vast number of people who have committed themselves to sharing the gospel to the ends of the earth. Nearly 100 of those included paid for this with their lives and became martyrs. But it is equally encouraging to see how Jewish believers have made an important impact on the worldwide mission of the church.

A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Romans. Joseph Shulam with Hilary Le Cornu. Lederer, 1997. Pp xix + 530.

Reviewed by John Fischer

This new commentary by Joseph Shulam with Hilary Le Cornu on one of Paul's most important epistles is a welcome addition to the ever-increasing library of commentaries on this ancient rabbi's writings. Throughout this volume Shulam and Le Cornu consistently demonstrate the strong, clear connection of Paul's thought and style to his Jewish and rabbinic heritage. They show the Pharisaic (and occasionally Essene) nature of the content of this letter. Their constant and numerous references to and citations of these sources make this work an invaluable volume for student and scholar alike. Their clarifications and illustrations of Paul's rabbinic methodology and style are most enlightening and helpful as well. Each chapter's discussion begins with an "Introduction," a paragraph which outlines the flow of Paul's argument in that chapter. This reviewer found these sections to be succinct and excellent summaries of Romans' chapters. Their inclusion is a real strong point of this commentary, and they are very effective in encapsulating Paul's thought as found in the various chapters.

Any commentary on Romans must carefully and adequately address certain key sections of the rabbi's letter to Rome. For this reviewer this must include a sound discussion of chapters 6-7 and chapters 9-11, since these sections deal with such vital issues as the believer's identification with Yeshua, the role of the Torah, and the ongoing place of Israel. In both these crucial sections Shulam and Le Cornu do a fine job, with their discussion of 9-11 being particularly noteworthy.

A brief taste of this fine commentary would be appropriate:

God's plan was for the Gentiles to be 'resurrected'(cf. 4:17) ... and that their inclusion will make Israel jealous for their own God and thus return to him in faithfulness ... Paul appeals midrashically to Jeremiah 11:14-17, combined with verses from Job 14:7-9 and Isaiah 6:13, passages which speak of the regrowth of a tree-stump, in order to show how God's choice of Israel will be fulfilled once the Gentiles have (also) become obedient in

Yeshua ... Moreover, he uses the metaphor of "grafting in" to graphically demonstrate God's plan to bless all nations of the world through Abraham through the dual meaning of the Hebrew root barakh, 'to bless' 'to graft.' (p. 363)

It is worth noting that Shulam's positions on both Qumran and the dating of the rabbinic materials are matters of ongoing discussion among scholars in the various related fields. So for example, Neusner argues for a later dating of the rabbinic material, and many follow him. However, Albright, Mann, and Schiffman among others point to the evidence in Qumran and other sources for the authenticity and antiquity of the rabbinic material in oral form well back into the Hasmonean period. The insights of Ong and Gerhardsson on orally oriented societies and their transmission of material buttress the position defending the early dating of the materials. Shulam and Le Cornu do not interact with these discussions in any detail. However, this is not always a shortcoming when trying to speak to certain audiences not particularly interested in such matters. One further remark should suffice at this point. This volume functions both as a brief commentary and a beneficial collection of sources and resources. Hence, it may not fit neatly into any convenient category of commentary, whether critical or lay.

Even in fine works there are things about which to quibble, and this volume is no exception. Although the commentary is very good, the comments are occasionally not very insightful and with some regularity not particularly original. I found the discussion on 10:4 good but not long enough. Unfortunately, the comments on 10:6-8 – an important paragraph – were less than satisfactory in spelling out the implications of Paul's use of these quotations from the Torah. The discussion of another crucial text on the Torah (7:1-6) was also not very satisfying or helpful. There were times when the commentary came across as redundant, particularly in chapter 6. Finally, the authors' repeated and regular emphasis on the very crucial importance of baptism – while certainly appropriate within certain denominational theologies – is not particularly consistent with Paul's own thought in Romans, at least as this reviewer sees it.

The previous comments, however, are not meant to detract from this fine commentary's contribution to the literature on the writing of this great rabbi. Shulam and Le Cornu are to be commended on the service they have provided for all readers of Romans. Theirs is a volume that is a veritable gold mine of information and is a resource that is a must for any library.

Books Received

van Buren, Paul M.

According to the Scriptures. The Origins of the Gospel and of the Church's Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. Pp. ix, 147. \$16.00.

Holmgren, Frederick C.

The Old Testament & the Significance of Jesus. Embracing Change - Maintaining Christian Identity. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. Pp. xviii, 204. \$16.00.

Fahlbusch, Erwin, Lochman, Jan Milic, Mbiti, John, Pelikan, Jaroslav, and Vischer, Lukas (eds)

The Encyclopedia of Christianity. Volume 1: A-D. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999. Pp xxxviii, 893. \$100.00.

Green, Joel B. and Turner, Max (eds)

Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. Pp. x, 246. \$18.00.